

# Furman Magazine

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# FURMAN

M A G A Z I N E

SUMMER 1991





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SUMMER 1991  
VOLUME 35 NUMBER 1

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COVER: "An Irish Waif" by Willard Pate  
was one of the photographs on display in the  
first faculty/staff photography exhibit held at  
Furman. See story on page 18.





# A BRAND NEW GAME

BY MARGUERITE HAYS

*In the wake of a declining pool of high school graduates, Furman and other private colleges face major recruiting challenges.*

**O**n Monday morning, February 2, Carey Thompson, director of admissions at Furman, came to work a little earlier than usual.

By the time he arrived, most of his staff were already there, and three secretaries had started opening the mail.

Unlike most mornings, the office was quiet. Phones were not ringing. There were no high school students and their parents waiting in the large reception room. Two admissions counselors talked softly in one office, and other staff members worked at their desks.

After spending a few minutes at his desk, Thompson wandered from office to office, looking occasionally into the room where the mail was being opened. By 9 a.m. the Furman Post Office had delivered two more large containers of mail, including dozens of Federal Express envelopes.

For Thompson and his staff, that Monday — the deadline for applications to this fall's freshman class was Sunday — was something like election day is for politicians. Everything they had done for the preceding year had been leading up to that day, but once the time had come, there was nothing more to do except wait for the results.

As the hours passed and the mail continued to arrive, it became apparent that once again the efforts of the admissions staff had paid off. Judging from the number of applications received that day, added to those received earlier, a lot of high school students were hoping to come to Furman this fall.

Thompson was pleased, but cautious. Even before the final count was in, he



CHARLIE REGISTER

*As the February 1 deadline for applications approaches, the admissions staff handles a tremendous amount of mail.*

predicted that the total number of applications this year would be a little less than last year's total, and he was right. According to a count on March 1, Furman had received 2,329 applications, down six percent from 1990. While this was still more than enough applications to fill this year's 675-member freshman class, any decrease in applications can make the university less selective.

The decline in applications at Furman reflects a nationwide decline in the total number of high school graduates that began last year and is expected to continue through 1994. This decrease in the number of 18-year-olds, along with rising college costs, the recession and the war in the Middle East, has created an unstable and unpredictable student market for many

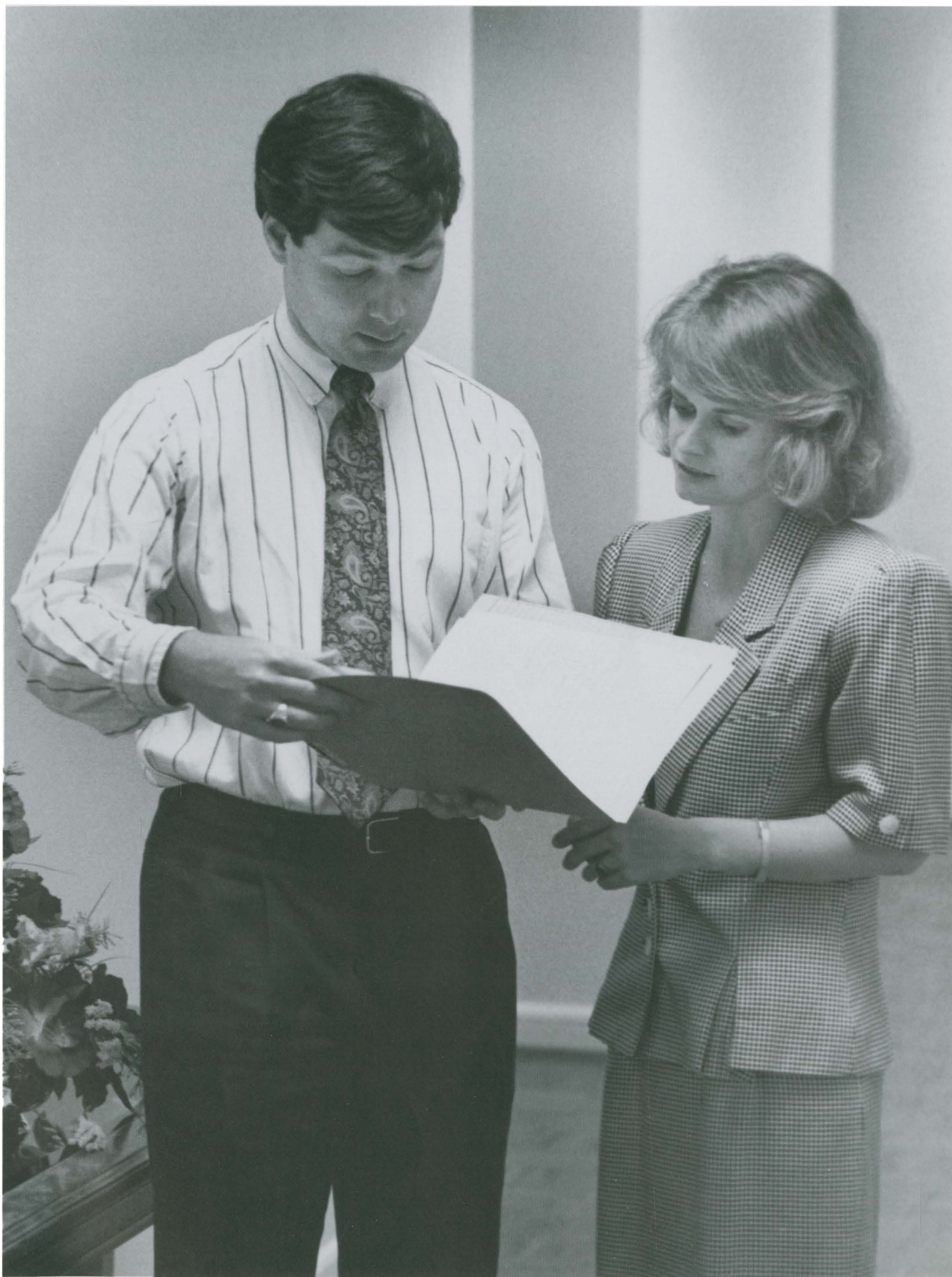
four-year private colleges. If a prospective student's father loses his job or was called to active military duty, an education at a private college may suddenly seem out of the question.

According to an article in the March 6 issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, applications for the coming academic year are generally down at private colleges and up at public institutions. "It's a brand new ball game," says Neill F. Sanders, dean of undergraduate admissions at Vanderbilt University. "Parents are thinking long and hard about that four-year investment of time and money and are telling their children they ought to consider applying to their local college."

"The national picture presents some real challenges for people in the admissions profession," says Carey Thompson, who was named director of admissions at Furman last spring following the promotion of Charles Brock to assistant dean for academic affairs. As admissions counselor, associate director and director, Thompson has been recruiting Furman students since he graduated from the university in 1982, except for a year off to earn a graduate degree.

"Furman draws many of its best and brightest students from about 25 metropolitan areas in the Southeast," he explains. "Last year there was a four percent decrease in the number of high school seniors in these areas and the number will continue to decline through the mid-nineties. This means that Furman must either get a larger

*Admissions director Carey Thompson and associate director Laura Brown examine an applicant's transcript.*







*Counselor Dana Evans (left) coordinates the Furman Admissions Network, a program that involves alumni and parents in the recruiting process.*

percentage of students in these areas or find new geographic areas to draw from. We're trying to do both, and both are real challenges."

In fact, about 85 percent of Furman's current students come from six Southeastern states — 47 percent from South Carolina and 38 percent from Georgia, Florida, North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia. The rest are from 32 other states and seven foreign countries.

The responsibility for recruiting students falls mainly on Thompson and his 10-member staff, which consists of an associate director, an assistant director, three counselors and support staff. The process of recruiting a class begins with identifying high school students who may be interested in attending Furman. Because Furman draws students from such a wide geographic area, prospective students must be contacted in many different ways.

Some students simply write or call the admissions office to request information. Others are referred to admissions by high school guidance counselors, ministers, alumni and other people.

Thompson and his counselors find about 25 percent of Furman's prospective students by traveling to their hometowns. During the fall counselors spend six to ten weeks visiting most of the major cities in the Southeast and some areas in the Northeast. Next fall they will extend their travels to Memphis, St. Louis, Dallas, Houston and New Orleans. Thompson also travels with representatives of 18 other private colleges on a swing through the Southwest to recruit students.

In each city Furman counselors usually visit several high schools, talk with guid-

ance counselors and meet with students who have expressed an interest in Furman. Whenever possible, they schedule their visits around college fairs that bring students from area high schools to one central location to talk with college representatives.

Over the years Furman representatives have established warm relationships with teachers and guidance counselors at a number of high schools that regularly send good students to Furman. This past year the largest number of South Carolina students outside Greenville came from Irmo and Spring Valley high schools in Columbia, Greenwood and Spartanburg high schools, Hanna in Anderson and Northwestern in Rock Hill. Outside the state, the high schools represented by the largest numbers of students were Marist, George Walton, Dunwoody and North Springs in Atlanta; McCallie and Girls Preparatory in Chattanooga; and Winter Park in Orlando.

Because staff travel is limited by time and money, the admissions office relies on direct mail to reach some prospects. Each spring, through the College Board Student Search program, Furman mails information brochures to about 60,000 high school juniors with Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test scores of 1100 or higher. Last year about 12 percent of those who received the brochures responded, most who responded visited the campus, and at least 150 of them are planning to attend Furman this fall.

Other students become interested in Furman through the Furman Scholars Program. Each year Furman asks high schools throughout the Southeast to nominate four juniors — two men and two women — to be Furman Scholars. These students and their parents are invited to the campus on

a Saturday in April to meet professors and students and find out more about the university. Approximately 300 students and their parents usually attend Furman Scholars Day, and about 125 Furman Scholars usually enroll in Furman each fall.

As soon as the admissions office receives the names of interested students, those names go into a computer file called the "inquiry pool." As the months go by, all contacts with students are recorded in this file. By the time students begin to apply, there are about 25,000 names in the inquiry pool for each class.

During the course of the admissions process, the staff keeps in touch with prospective students by telephone and mail. At various stages students receive personal notes from admissions counselors, Christmas and birthday cards, and letters from Thompson, President John E. Johns, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean John Crabtree, professors, students and other Furman officials. They also receive a number of publications, including a facts brochure, financial aid brochure, newsletter, viewbook, catalogue and brochures about the academic departments in which they have expressed an interest.

"Over a year's time, we spend about \$65,000 on postage and send out about 225,000 pieces of mail to prospective students," says Thompson. "We try to give them all the information they need to make a good choice. Of course, we want them to come to Furman, but we know that Furman is not right for everyone. We don't want anyone to come and then find it's not what they were expecting."

In all of their contacts with prospective students, admissions counselors urge students to visit the campus and see Furman for themselves. In the spring and fall, hundreds of families visit the admissions office and take a guided tour of the campus. Some students attend classes and meet professors; some talk with financial aid counselors. About 70 Furman students assist admissions by conducting tours and serving as hosts for students who want to spend a night or weekend on campus.

The admissions office also sponsors special programs that bring students to campus. Besides Furman Scholars Day for high school juniors, the office invites all seniors who have been accepted for admission and their parents to attend Visitation Day in the spring to get better acquainted with the university. In cooperation with the Student League for Black

Culture, it also brings minority students to the campus for special programs.

Studies have shown that high school students generally narrow their college choices during the summer before their senior year and by late fall have picked the colleges where they will apply. Most students who apply to Furman also apply to two or three other colleges.

Students applying for admission to Furman have two options. Those who have decided that Furman is their first-choice college may apply for Early Decision admission by December 1, and the university notifies them of its decision by December 15. All others apply for Regular Decision admission by February 1; the university notifies them in early March.

As the application deadlines near, the

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*Each spring, Furman welcomes talented high school juniors and their families to campus on Furman Scholars Day.*

days become more hectic for the admissions staff. Not only is the office filled with visiting students and parents, but the phones ring constantly as students call to make sure their transcripts and other required documents have reached Furman.

Staff members begin to read Early Decision applications in late November and continue through mid-December. They read Regular Decision applications during February and early March. In effect, they screen applications for the admissions committee, which considers all borderline applications individually. Made up of faculty, students and administrators, the committee sets admissions policy and makes all final decisions.

After students have been notified of acceptance by Furman, they must notify Furman if they intend to enroll and pay a reservation fee. At Furman, Early Decision applicants must reply by February 1. Regular Decision applicants have until

May 1 to commit.

For both students and college, this is the most critical stage in the admissions process. During this time the Furman admissions office usually sends additional literature to students, contacts them by telephone and asks alumni and students to call them, and sponsors receptions for prospective students and their parents in some cities. Students and their families often visit the campus, sometimes for the second time, for personal interviews with admissions counselors and to take a closer look at the university.

"Students and parents are much more discerning today," says Benny Walker, associate dean for admissions and financial aid at Furman. "They are looking more carefully at the quality of programs and services. In the past there was a more genial relationship, but now it verges on being litigious. They want to make sure colleges do what they say they do. Families are coming in now and going to the placement





office and calling Public Safety. They're concerned about health care, drugs and AIDS. The moods of our market reflect society's moods."

Because cost is a major consideration for some families (Furman's fees for next year will total \$14,448 — \$10,720 for tuition and \$3,728 for room and board), the admissions and financial aid offices work together closely to make Furman affordable to all qualified students. This year for the first time Furman promised to meet the demonstrated need of every student who was accepted for admission.

To do this, the financial aid office works with students individually to put together a package of aid, usually including grant, loan and work funds. Counselors advise students on how to make the most of all federal and state assistance for which they are eligible. For example, South Carolina residents may qualify for state tuition grants ranging up to \$3,990 a year. The financial aid office also places students in college work-study, a financial aid program that defrays college expenses through on-campus employment. In addition, Furman offers payment programs that spread the cost of college over a longer, more manageable period of time, including a plan that allows families to pay on a monthly basis over 10 months.

"Not only are we selling Furman, we're selling accessibility and affordability," says Walker. "When 70 percent of your students get some kind of aid, you have to have something for everybody."

To recruit top students more effectively, Furman has restructured its scholarship program. Instead of offering a large number of small scholarships, Furman now awards to freshmen four Presidential Scholarships (which pay all university costs), 10 Founders Scholarships (full tuition), 30 Duke and Honor Scholarships (half-tuition), 35 quarter tuition scholarships, 35 music scholarships for up to half tuition, and National Merit Scholarships for finalists who indicate that Furman is their first choice college.

"This represents a major financial outlay on Furman's part, and we badly need contributions for this purpose," says Walker. "But it's part of our strategy to make Furman more competitive with other colleges. Most state schools, including the University of South Carolina and Clemson, give full tuition scholarships to all high school valedictorians."

The strategy to make Furman more accessible to good students seems to be working. Although Furman received fewer applications this year than last, the quality of the applicant pool actually improved.



CHARLIE REGISTER

More high school valedictorians and salutatorians (200) applied this year than ever before, and the average SAT score is 22 points higher than last year's average score.

Even as the admissions staff continues to provide information and counseling to students who have been accepted for this fall, it is also recruiting students for the falls of 1992 and 1993. And as usual in the summer, many students and their families are visiting the campus.

Both Carey Thompson and Benny Walker are convinced that Furman can overcome the demographic problems of the next few years with the help of everyone connected with Furman. "I would like for everyone to think of student recruitment as their responsibility," says Thompson. "I hope our students will tell other students about Furman. And I hope our alumni will remember how much a Furman education has meant to them and help us look for good students."

Nearly 100 alumni and parents of current students are already involved in recruiting through the Furman Admissions Network (FAN), and Thompson is looking for more volunteers. "We hope to see this program develop as an important extension of the admissions office," he says.

According to Thompson, taking part in the FAN Club usually requires only 10 to 20 hours a year. Volunteers assist the admissions office by contacting prospective students who live in their area, representing

Furman at college fairs and attending — and sometimes hosting — drop-ins and receptions for prospective students.

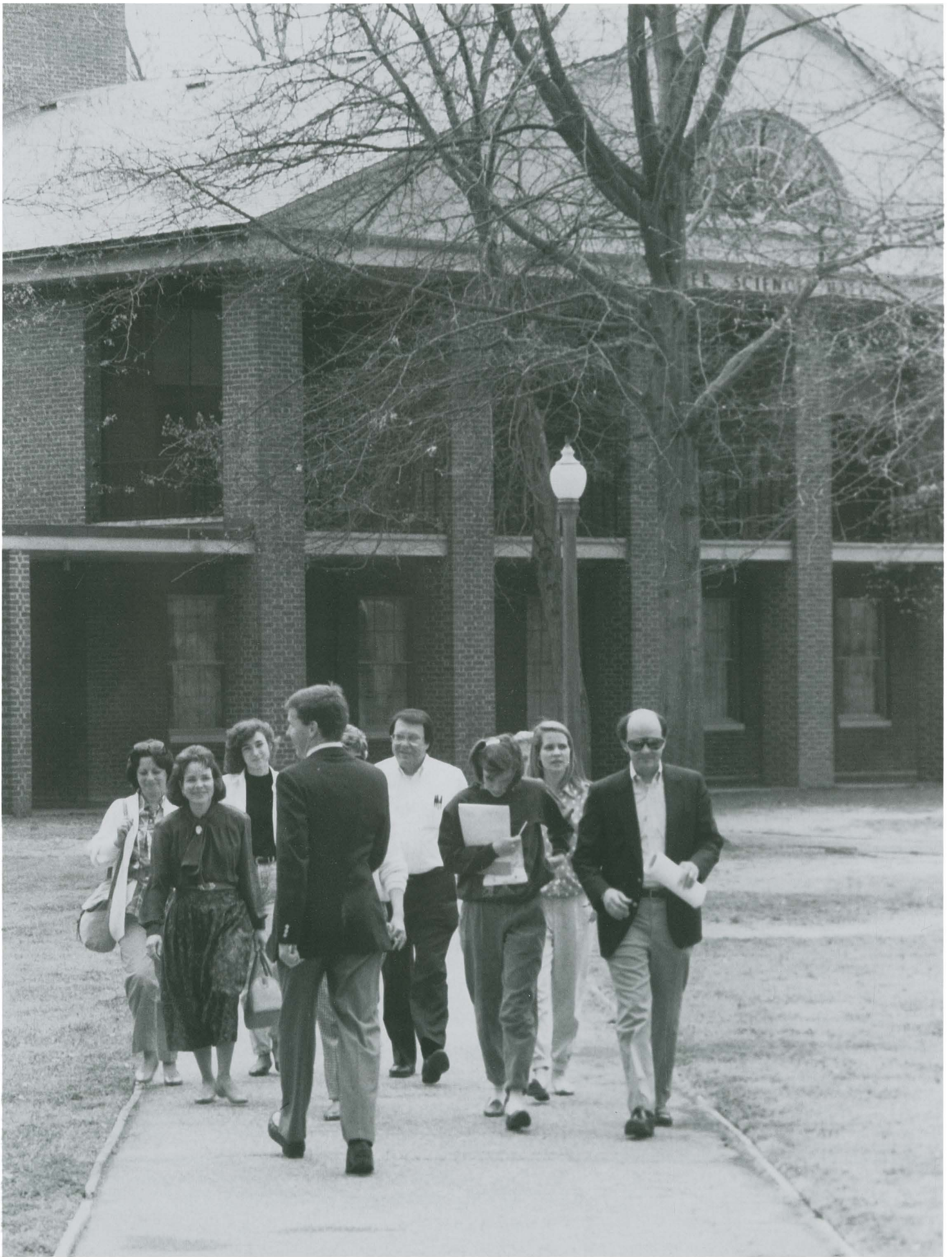
"We particularly need alumni who live outside the Southeast to take an active role in this effort," he says. Anyone who would like to find out more about the FAN Club should call Dana Evans, coordinator, in the admissions office, (803) 294-2034.

But alumni don't have to join the FAN Club to help. "The most important thing alumni can do for us is to tell people about Furman and be on the lookout for prospective students among the children of their friends and associates," says Thompson. "We want them to send us the names and addresses of any students who might be interested in a Furman education, and we will send the students more information about Furman." (Postcards are included in this issue of the magazine for your convenience in joining the FAN Club and sending the names of prospective students to the admissions office.)

"There's no way in the world we can be everywhere there are good students," says Thompson. "That's why we really must get more alumni involved in telling Furman's story." □

*Walking backwards is one of the required skills for serving as an admissions tour guide. About 70 Furman students assist the admissions office in giving tours and serving as hosts to high school students and their families.*









# DETAINED IN THE MIDDLE EAST

BY CHARLES GROSE

*Alumnus Charles Grose was one of the Americans held at the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait after the Iraqi invasion.*

On August 2, 1990, at about 5:30 a.m. the telephone rang in my Kuwait City apartment. The world had changed. Iraq was invading Kuwait.

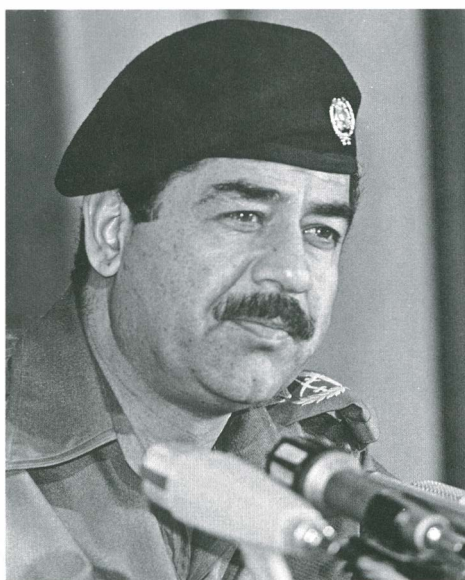
My two roommates and I were asked to report to the American Embassy. We could hear artillery and small arms fire in the distance. Suddenly, our summer internships at the American Embassy in Kuwait had ended, and we had joined a crisis management team led by United States Ambassador Nathaniel Howell.

The Iraqi invasion was both frightening and exciting. Constant artillery fire and periodic exchanges of small arms fire resounded throughout Kuwait for several days and were a constant source of concern. At any moment a stray round could have breached the embassy; indeed, two artillery rounds severely damaged an apartment high-rise across the street. I had a real sense that I was participating in a significant historical event.

My memories of the first few days of the invasion blend together because I worked long, hard hours and lost sleep. Soon, Iraqi occupation forces asserted control over the country and the shooting stopped, except for after-dark attacks by the Kuwaiti resistance.

Embassy Kuwait developed a routine — not an ordinary routine but a routine nonetheless. We were experiencing the greatest stress of our lives, and it was important to

*Shortly after returning to the United States, Charles Grose describes his ordeal to reporters during a press conference at Furman.*



AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

*As the world united in opposition to the Iraqi invasion, Saddam Hussein began detaining Westerners in Iraq and Kuwait.*

establish new rituals to maintain our mental health. Of course, our options were limited. For all practical purposes we were confined to the embassy compound. It was not wise to spend much time outside the safety of the compound's walls.

During the first week of the occupation, my thoughts turned to my planned August 9 departure from Kuwait and the August 21 beginning of my second year of law school at the University of South Carolina. Clearly, with all routes out of Kuwait, including the international airport, sealed off by the Iraqi forces, my departure would be delayed.

The crisis became more complicated when President Bush ordered American forces to defend Saudi Arabia. This meant the invasion was no longer a territorial and economic dispute between Arab neighbors but an international crisis. The world's oil supply was clearly threatened, and as the world united against Iraq's invasion, Saddam Hussein began detaining Westerners in Iraq and Kuwait. My departure would be delayed longer than I had originally expected.

I watched developing events and the emergence of the international coalition on Armed Forces Television, which was available at Embassy Kuwait. I cheered as Americans successfully escaped the horrors of occupied Kuwait and jeered as the media detailed the specifics of the escape routes, preventing other Westerners from using the same routes. After all, American television is available to the Iraqi authorities.

As international pressure intensified, the Iraqis sought to legitimize their illegal invasion and unrecognized annexation of Kuwait. All foreign embassies in Kuwait were ordered closed by August 24. Iraq apparently rationalized that with the two countries "unified," diplomatic representation was necessary in Baghdad only. With the exception of a few small countries, no embassy closed completely. Nevertheless, the decision was made to evacuate nonessential American Embassy personnel and their dependents from Kuwait through Iraq to Jordan or Turkey. Iraq refused to open the Kuwait-Saudi border.

Early on August 23 we departed for Baghdad, where we planned to rest before continuing out of Iraq. Kuwait City was



silent, almost dead, as we emerged from the safety of the embassy compound. Soon, the highway was crowded with other nationals, mostly Asian in origin, who were also attempting to leave Kuwait and Iraq. The convoy of over 30 vehicles took 19 ½ hours to reach Baghdad.

As we left Kuwait, we saw a large number of vehicles that had been abandoned or destroyed. Many were smashed or overturned and stripped for parts, and most were missing their tires. Surprisingly, many tanks were abandoned. They were burned out, probably by the Kuwaiti resistance hoping to frustrate their occupiers.

We traveled through the massive Iraqi occupation forces stationed along the road to the Kuwait-Iraqi border. Tanks, artillery equipment and antiaircraft weapons were everywhere. Some young Iraqi soldiers slept on their tanks; a few were just beginning to wake up, while others were alert and wandering about. Many wore mismatched uniforms and showed signs of having lived in the desert for days or weeks. As we approached the border, traffic from Iraq increased as loaded troop carriers moved southward into Kuwait.

Iraqi officials made our convoy wait for over three hours at the border before allowing us to cross into Iraq. Because Iraq claimed Kuwait as its 19th province, it seemed ironic that the Iraqis would make such a big deal out of the border.


The wait was not pleasant. The border crossing was our first direct encounter with the Iraqi authorities since we left the embassy in Kuwait. I was not sure how we would be treated. Although we were allowed to park the vehicles in a large, covered car park, the heat was inescapable. I soon broke into the first of many bottles of water I would drink during the journey. I tried to nap on the front seat of the car, but the heat prevented any serious rest. Families traveling with pets walked and watered their animals. Despite their best efforts, the heat and the journey would eventually claim the lives of several pets.

Immediately after crossing the border, we had to buy gas. Filling each vehicle was a slow process. As our car waited, I drank even more water and watched the traffic traveling northward along the highway. Large open-top trucks were "filled" with Kuwait as the small country was being systematically dismantled and brought to Iraq. On this day the trucks carried household items such as furniture and appliances. Already, I had heard stories of hospitals being dismantled and equipment stolen. Reportedly, some babies were removed from their incubators and left to die.

The roads we traveled varied in quality but served our purpose. In fact, the Ameri-

can Federal Highway Authority had spent over 20 years constructing the road system in Kuwait. The highway we first encountered inside Iraq was of comparable quality, at least for our purpose. It was three lanes in each direction and allowed rapid movement for many miles. Soon, however, we had to leave the wide road and travel along narrow, two-lane country roads. These roads took the convoy away from the desert and through small Iraqi towns before finally returning us to a superhighway that led into Baghdad.

Traveling along these narrow country roads, I witnessed both the wealth and the poverty of Iraq. Iraq's wealth rests in its natural resources. In addition to its huge oil resources, Iraq possesses vast arable land for growing crops. And because Iraq has over 15 million people, it has the population



*"As I slept on a couch  
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necessary to build a strong agricultural and industrial economy. In contrast, Kuwait has only oil as a resource and a small population which depends on foreign labor.

But Kuwait has thrived while Iraq has not. Instead of developing his country's resources, Saddam Hussein concentrated his efforts on a strong military and the recently completed war with Iran. The people and villages of the countryside have been neglected. Living conditions are poor, housing is dilapidated and children wear dirty, worn clothing. When we stopped for gas a second time, children tried to sell us ice blocks to make money.

During the journey we frequently switched drivers. Nevertheless, fatigue affected me and I drank hot, carbonated soda water to stay awake. The bad taste was enough of a stimulant to keep me from falling asleep at the wheel. I looked forward to arriving in Baghdad and resting for several hours.

Upon reaching the American Embassy in Baghdad, we learned that the Iraqis had refused to grant us exit visas. Iraq was so tightly controlled that no one could leave the country without an exit visa. In fact, foreigners faced stiff penalties if they failed to register their presence in Iraq with the

residency office. As I slept on a couch in an Embassy Baghdad residence, I was thankful for the rest but was uncertain about what was to come.

The next day we received word that the women dependents and children in the group would be allowed to depart through Turkey. King Hussein of Jordan had made a special request to this effect, and Saddam honored it. This group made the long, difficult journey to freedom, although it encountered delays similar to our initial trip from Kuwait. At the border all the women and the children under the age of 18 were allowed to leave. Three college-age dependents, however, had their exit visas canceled and had to return to Baghdad.

With the timing of our eventual departure uncertain, we needed to establish a new routine. Embassy tasks were divided among the new arrivals. There was much work to be done because the nonessential personnel and dependents of the embassy had already evacuated. A snack bar was established and served lunch five days a week. We would work eight to nine hours a day. Soon, many of us began playing a daily basketball game. Physical activity alleviated stress and helped us exercise muscles that otherwise could have deteriorated. We settled into embassy residences where we lived and ate in groups. Eventually, my sleeping arrangements changed from a couch to a box spring (similar to the one I had slept on in Kuwait after the invasion) to an ordinary double bed.

Ironically, I had hoped to visit Baghdad during my summer in Kuwait. Now, I was forced to live in Baghdad for an undetermined length of time. Unfortunately, I was not able to tour the sights; safety considerations mandated that I stay either at my residence or the embassy. After all, other Americans were being detained against their will at undisclosed locations. Although I was denied an exit visa and detained against my will, I did not have to endure the tremendous hardship forced upon many Americans and other Westerners.

At the same time, I was fortunate to be in Baghdad and not at the American Embassy in Kuwait. After August 24 the Iraqis surrounded the embassy and cut off its power and water supply. The brave Americans that remained were forced to make careful use of their resources to defy the Iraqi intimidation.

In short, my two-month stay in Baghdad was comfortable compared to the admirable three-month stand made at the embassy in Kuwait. I could call home to the United States several times each week, exercise

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*Grose was one of 14 American citizens who were released and flown out of Iraq to Amman, Jordan, on October 23.*

regularly, enjoy a warm shower, and eat a hot meal. One of the families that had left Baghdad had employed a cook and maid from Morocco. The group I lived with decided to reemploy her and enjoyed the delicious dishes she prepared. I was also able to watch videotaped movies and play board games with my new housemates.

On October 23 my unplanned residency in Baghdad ended. The Charge d'Affaires informed 14 of us that we would be granted exit visas that afternoon and allowed to depart with the American-Iraqi Friendship Foundation, one of several groups that had come to Baghdad to seek the release of hostages. One hour later we were packed and saying our goodbyes to friends who would be forced to remain. Our departure was delayed several times, but soon our Iraqi Air flight landed safely in Jordan.

That night and the next night in London we relaxed and enjoyed our newly regained freedom. But as I left Baghdad farther behind, two important thoughts dominated my concerns. First, my friends were forced to remain and there was nothing I could do about it. Secondly, my release, like the

*"I had hoped that  
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the Iraqi people."*

original detainment of all the hostages, was part of Saddam's efforts to split the international coalition and enable him to keep Kuwait. On the same day I was freed, the release of all French hostages and 34 British hostages was announced. Saddam's plan was clear: reduce international opposition to Iraq by freeing hostages. Thankfully, all Western hostages were freed.

After returning home, I resumed my routine and reentered law school in January. But my thoughts frequently turned to the gulf crisis, and once the war started I prayed for the safety of my friends in Baghdad and Kuwait.

Since the end of the war, I have often thought of the suffering caused by Iraq's

invasion of Kuwait and the war in the Persian Gulf. Many innocent people — Kuwaitis, Iraqis and third-country nationals who had lived and worked in Kuwait — have endured terrible hardships.

I had hoped that the war would end the suffering of the Iraqi people. But it has not — at least not yet. I am glad that the United States and its coalition partners have stepped in to try to alleviate some of the country's problems.

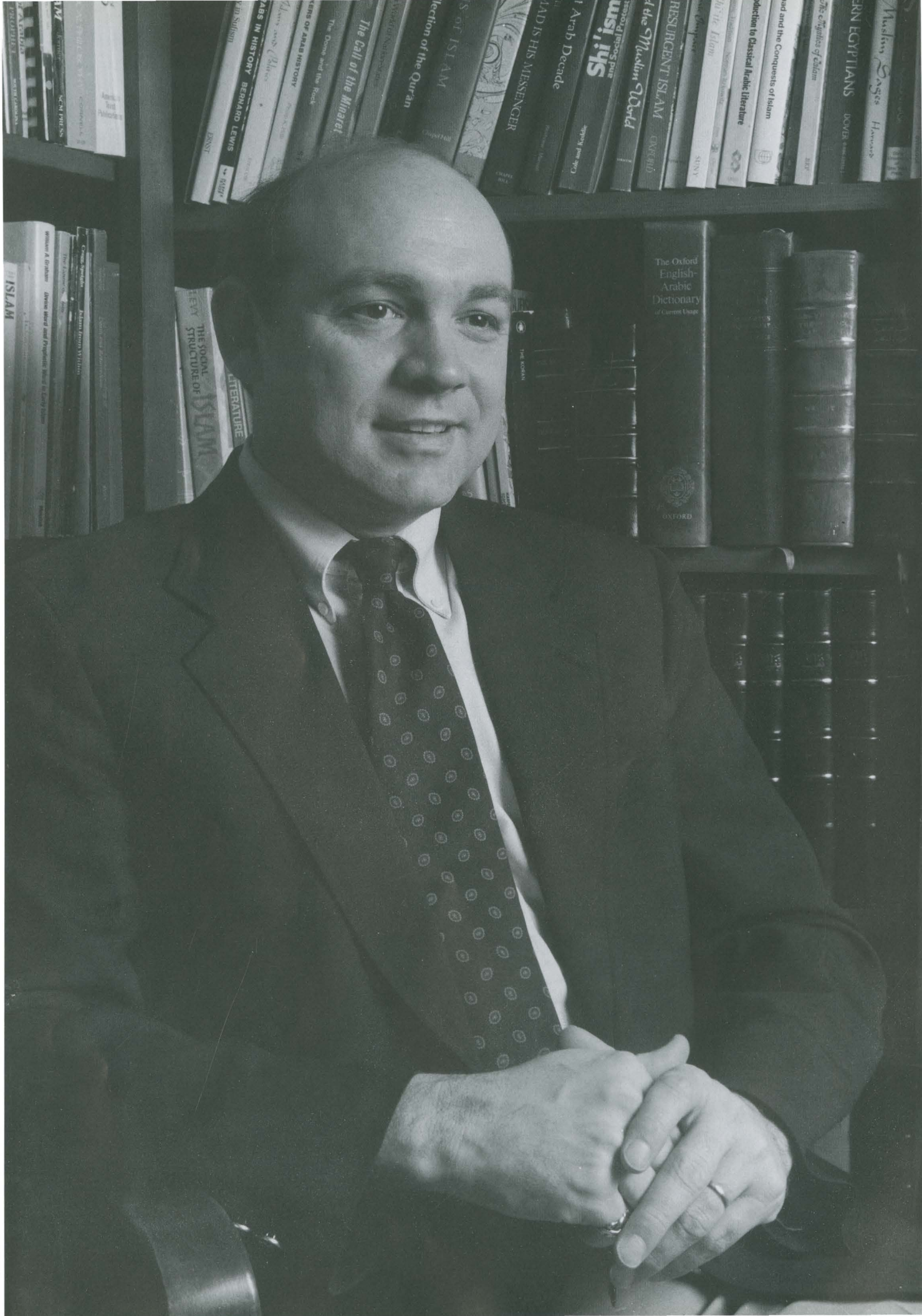
As time passes, I hope the Bush administration will continue to focus on such issues as democracy and human rights in the Middle East — issues that concern all of us because of their impact on world peace. As for me, I will follow events in that part of the world more closely than ever. My experiences in Kuwait and Iraq increased my awareness and understanding of the immense problems in the Middle East. I hope some day to help solve them. □

*A 1989 Furman graduate, Charles Grose attends law school at the University of South Carolina. He is studying Arabic at American University in Cairo this summer.*



AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS





# UNDERSTANDING ISLAM

BY CHARLES KIMBALL

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*A former negotiator during the Iran hostage crisis, Charles Kimball believes Christian-Muslim relations will improve as Americans learn more about Islam.*

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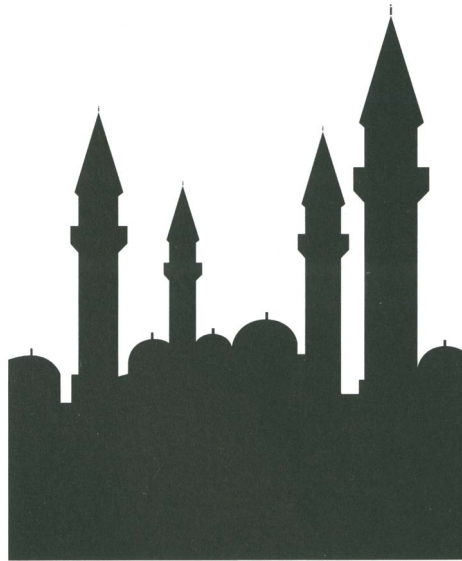
When I am asked how I, a Southern Baptist minister, have become so deeply involved in Middle East studies, I always explain that it's a long story. My paternal grandfather was Jewish, one of nine children in a family that immigrated from the Poland/Russia area in the 1880s. Although my grandfather married a Christian, the larger extended family remained Jewish. As a result I was imbued during childhood with a very positive understanding of the Jewish tradition.

During high school and college I was not only actively involved in church and church-related organizations, I also began an academic study of religion through an undergraduate minor. The various questions related to Christian faith and religious diversity challenged and intrigued me. What does it mean to be a person of faith, a Christian, and live out that faith in a particular denominational tradition in a world of such religious diversity? With the assistance of several thoughtful pastors and faculty members during my graduate studies at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Harvard University, I pursued issues arising from such questions. My doctoral work in the history of religion (comparative religion) concentrated on Islam and Christian-Muslim relations.

In the course of the past 15 years, I have had extraordinary opportunities for direct involvement in Middle Eastern affairs. One

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*An expert in Middle East studies, Charles Kimball joined the Furman faculty last fall as associate professor of religion.*



of the most interesting episodes came in 1979-81. Through an unusual series of events, I was one of seven Americans invited to Iran during the early months of the Iranian hostage conflict. As one of two clergy who had studied the Qur'an (sometimes rendered Koran) and the Islamic religious tradition, I was warmly received by Iranian religious and political leaders. On two other occasions, a colleague and I were invited back to Iran as "honest American ministers" who could help facilitate communication where very little was taking place. These efforts attracted considerable attention in the international media since we were among the only Americans involved in personal meetings with Ayatollah Khomeini, then-President

Bani-Sadr and Ali Akbar Hashemi ar-Rafsanjani, who was then the speaker of the Parliament and now serves as president of Iran. I also spent five hours with the student militants during two visits inside the U.S. Embassy compound.

In 1977-78, during the time Anwar Sadat visited Jerusalem and began the peace process with Israel, my wife and I lived in Egypt and traveled widely in the region. Subsequently, I have traveled throughout the Middle East on more than 30 occasions. Much of my involvement has centered on church-related ministries to people caught in war or unable to provide basic necessities for their families. My work has included extensive involvement in the same kinds of traumatic human situations we have all witnessed during and after the gulf war. In the process, I have worked closely with many U.S. and Middle Eastern political and religious leaders.

One overriding impression derived from these endeavors centers on the pervasive ignorance of and misperceptions about Islam. Media coverage of the war with Iraq did little to clarify the picture. For most Americans, the barrage of images was confusing. Saddam Hussein's repeated calls for "holy war" against the "infidels" contrasted with positive pictures of Saudi, Kuwaiti and Egyptian Muslims participating in the U.S.-led coalition. Descriptions of restrictive and oppressive conditions for Saudi women and surprising portrayals of "moderate" Iranian leaders added to the complexity.

While the massive media coverage failed to produce a more coherent understanding





*While studying at American University in Cairo in 1977, Kimball became acquainted with Mrs. Jehan Sadat, wife of Anwar Sadat, who was then president of Egypt.*

of Islam, it did underscore the central role of this religious community on the world stage. Muslims today number some one billion adherents. Now, perhaps more than ever, it is important that we in the West understand more accurately some fundamental tenets of the world's second largest religious tradition.

## Basic Tenets of Islam

The central message of Islam is lodged in the simple confession of faith: "There is no god, but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God." Islam is a radical monotheism. Muslims affirm one true God as Creator and Sustainer of the universe whose will has been manifest to humankind through prophetic revelation. They believe this revelation is now contained in the Qur'an, which they consider to be the literal, perfect and complete word of God. Muslims believe the proper human response to this revelation is obedience both in worship of God and in all aspects of life.

A brief Arabic lesson helps to demystify the fundamental meaning of key terms and make clear the basic orientation of Muslims. Like Hebrew, Arabic is built on a consonantal root system. Most words are derived from three consonants which convey a basic notion. The letters k-t-b, for instance, relate to the idea of writing. When different vowels, prefixes or suffixes are added, words are formed. Thus kataba means "he wrote"; a kitab is a "book"; a maktab is an "office" (a place where writing occurs); a maktabah is a "library"; and so forth.

The root meanings of s-l-m have to do

with submission to the will of God and peace. Three familiar words derive from this root: salam, Islam and Muslim. "Salam" means "peace, well-being"; it originates from the same root as the more familiar Hebrew word shalom. (The "s" and "sh" are distinctive letters in Arabic and Hebrew; they are often transposed in usage in these two Semitic languages.) Islam literally means "submission to the will of God"; it is "the religion of peace." Those who submit themselves in obedience to God are Muslims; they are, by definition, people "at peace" in creation.

Muslims worship the same God as Christians and Jews. Many non-Arabic speakers, confused by the name Allah, have not made this connection. Allah is simply the Arabic term for God. In the Middle East today the 10-12 million indigenous Arabic-speaking Christians pray to Allah, just as the French pray to Dieu and Germans to Gott. For Muslims there is no ambiguity: the one, true God is the God of Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad and everyone else in creation.

As with Christianity, foundational doctrines and devotional practices in Islam can be described in a relatively straightforward

ward manner. The vitality of the religious tradition as embraced and lived out by faithful adherents is a far more subtle and complex matter. Christians, for example, believe that Jesus, the incarnation of God, died for the sins of the world and was resurrected miraculously by God. These affirmations provide little indication, however, of how people of faith have, in different times and places, appropriated the implications of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. The same is true for Islam. Descriptive accounts of basic teachings are helpful, but they fail to convey the texture and diversity found within the history of this extensive religious tradition.

In 610, at the age of 40, Muhammad had a profound and disturbing experience he understood as a revelation from God mediated by the angel Gabriel. Shaken by the episode, he doubted both his sanity and his worthiness to be God's prophetic messenger. Encouraged by his wife and a few close friends, he came to accept this responsibility. Over a period of 23 years he uttered the messages he perceived as coming from Gabriel. These words, memorized and written down by followers, comprise the Qur'an.

The basic themes, particularly in the early portions of the Qur'an, are familiar: the sublime majesty of God, the futility of idol worship, the certainty of God's judgment, and human responsibility for faith in God and for fair, compassionate behavior in society. Later themes included a variety of doctrinal teachings as well as social and ethical responsibilities in areas such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, responsibility towards children, commercial dealings, and also prohibitions against criminal behavior such as theft, adultery and murder.

Muslims believe that Muhammad was the last in a long succession of prophetic messengers sent to humankind. Many of the prophets named in the Qur'an are also major figures in the Bible. These include Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, John the Baptist and Jesus. Most Christians are surprised to discover the importance Muslims attach to Jesus. Mentioned by name in 93 different verses, Jesus is venerated as one of the greatest prophets. He is unique by virtue of the miraculous virgin birth as well as his distinctive names. Jesus is called a "word" from God, the "messiah," and "a spirit from God." In the final analysis, however, Muslims are clear: Jesus, like all the prophets, was human.

*Muslims worship  
the same God as  
Christians and Jews.*

The error of his followers, according to the Qur'an, is that they claim things about Jesus—namely, that he was God's son, divine, that he was resurrected by God and is now part of the Trinity—that Jesus never claimed for himself. These are dangerous teachings in the Islamic understanding because they challenge the absolute oneness and unity of God. Accordingly, the Qur'an includes stern words of warning for Christians and others who associate anything so immediately with God.

Grave warnings against doctrinal error notwithstanding, the Qur'an makes clear that the religious communities should exist in complete freedom. A famous qur'anic declaration asserts, "There shall be no compulsion in religious matters" (Qur'an 2:256). The closeness and saving value of the religions practiced by the "people of the book" are stated explicitly:

Behold! Those who have faith, and those who are Jews, Christians and Sabaeans—those who trust in God and the Last Day, and do what is righteous, they shall have their reward; no fear shall come upon them, neither shall they grieve.  
(Qur'an 2:62 and 5:69)

As with all human history and experience, there exists a gap between the principles and ideals in the religious tradition—as articulated by a founder, its sacred text(s) or the wisdom of tradition—and the practice of the adherents through the years. Accordingly, Islamic history includes numerous instances where this kind of openness is obscured by hostility and intolerance.

In addition to conveying the content of the revelation, Muhammad also proffered advice and made clear his perspectives on a wide range of subjects. From the outset, faithful Muslims have endeavored to preserve the authenticity of his words and deeds through recognized authorities. The sayings and actions of Muhammad provide an exemplary model for Muslims to emulate. While Muslims have always been careful to clarify that Muhammad was a man and in no way to be deified, his particular role has led, in fact, to special veneration at the popular level.

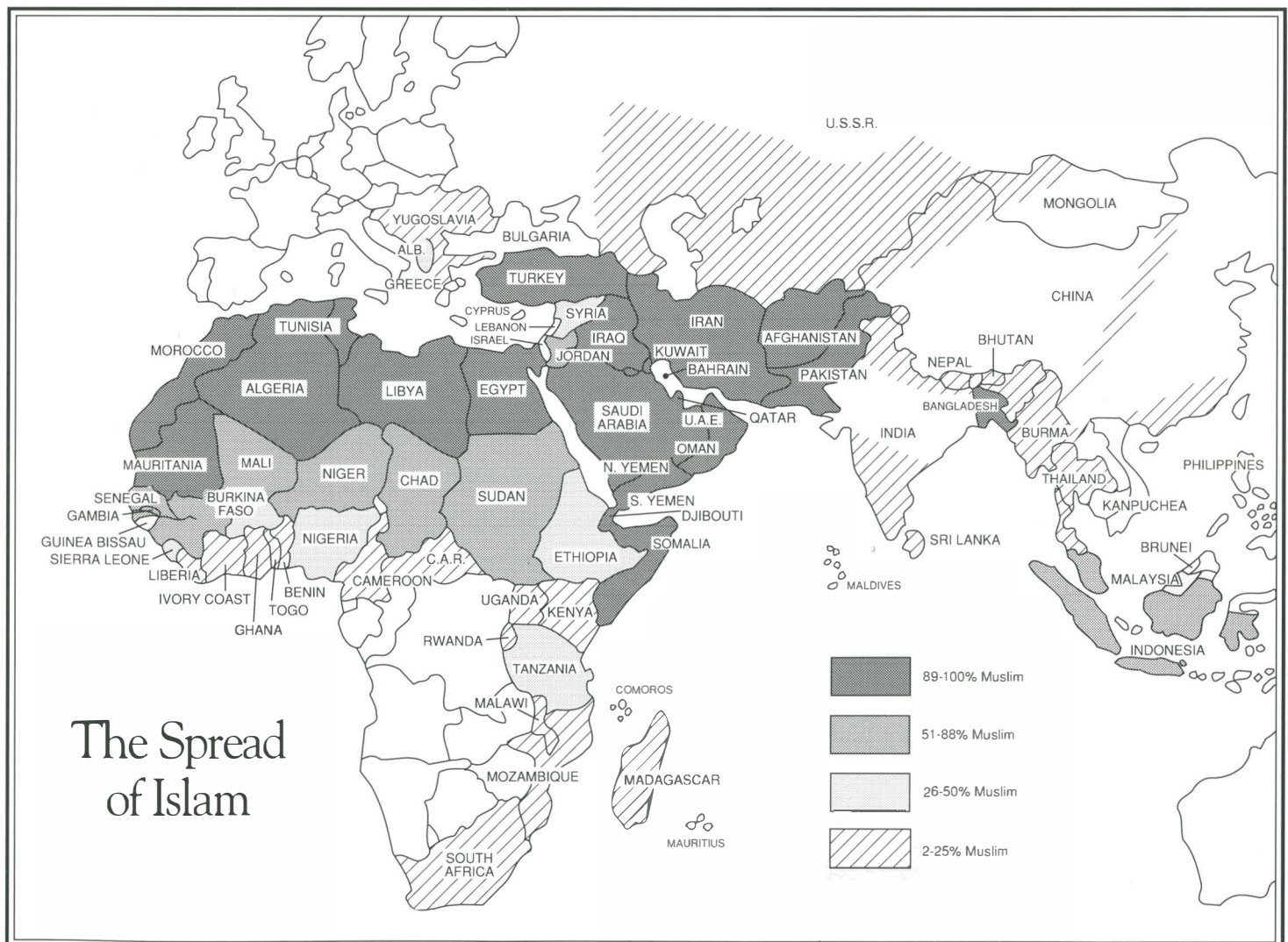
The life of faith begins with the confession, "There is no god, but God, and Muhammad is the Prophet of God." This is the first of the five devotional-ritual duties

known as the "pillars of Islam."

Prescribed prayer, *salat*, is the second and most conspicuous manifestation of faith. Five times daily, and on special occasions, Muslims are called to prayer from the tall minarets in the mosques. The actual prayer ritual combines several cycles of prayer (primarily recitation of qur'anic passages committed to memory) with different body postures. The worshippers stand in rows of straight lines oriented toward the Ka'bah, the central sacred site in Mecca. The symbolic unity of Muslims in prayer reflects the conviction that all people stand equally before God.

The third pillar of Islam is almsgiving or religious contribution (*zakat*). Each year, Muslims are expected to give 2 ½ percent of their overall wealth for the poor and less fortunate. *Zakat* is a religious duty which reflects the conviction that one's resources derive from God. As an institutional form of stewardship, *zakat* is an effective way to support the needs within the community and thereby strengthen the whole.

Each year, Muslims are required to fast (*sawm*) during the daylight hours of the month of Ramadan. The fast is supposed to





be a time for self-discipline and serious reflection. Among the benefits, Muslims cite the sense of unity experienced in fasting. Those things that normally divide people—status, class, wealth, race—are removed in the common experience. Moreover, the deprivation increases awareness of the plight of those less fortunate, those who do not enjoy the basic necessities. The fast of Ramadan, which began in mid-March, received unusual attention in 1991 because many feared it might complicate the potentially fragile alliances in the gulf war.

The final pillar is the pilgrimage (hajj) to Mecca. At some point in life, Muslims are expected to take part in the elaborate pilgrimage during the time set apart for the annual ritual. Each year, more than two million adherents participate, many coming after saving for years to make the journey.

Woven through these devotional-ritual practices are threads uniting Muslims as equal members of the community of faith. This does not mean, however, that all is harmonious within the “house of Islam.” Ask 10 Muslim women in different countries about equality in Islam and you will find no consensus. As one Saudi woman put it, “Some people are more equal than others!” In fact, a close look at Islamic history reveals patterns that are common in other communities: a rich tradition, inspiring people to their highest good and, at the same time, one replete with schism, power struggles, and political and military conflicts.

Even so, I think it is also important to underscore the inaccuracy of the stereotypical Western image of Islam as inherently backward, anti-intellectual and unsophisticated. The error of this image is particularly ironic in view of the major contributions Muslims have made in the shaping of Western civilization as we know it.

A sampling of English words originating with Muslim cultures provides a clue to primary areas of influence: admiral, alchemy, alcohol, alcove, alfalfa, algebra, arsenal, assassin, average, balcony, cable, candy, checkmate, coffee, cotton, divan, elixir, frieze, gala, giraffe, guitar, jasmine, lemon, lute, magazine, mask, mat, nadir, orange, rice, sapphire, sofa, sugar, syrup, tariff, zenith, zero.

When Europe was languishing in the “Dark Ages,” Islamic civilization was

thriving from Spain, across North Africa, through the Fertile Crescent and Mesopotamia, and into India. Most people are surprised to discover the substantial contributions of Muslims in science, engineering, navigation, mathematics, chemistry, medicine, astronomy, philosophy, architecture, horticulture and calligraphy.

Muslims are very proud of their history and civilization. For the past four centuries, however, much of the Muslim world has been dominated by external powers. Some of the convulsions and upheavals evident in the Middle East today are born of frustrations stemming from centuries of domination by the Ottoman Empire, the colonial powers, the superpowers and contemporary leaders who are rarely in power by virtue of popular choice. Saddam Hussein and others

Saddam’s rhetoric featured several components: repeated calls for a jihad (usually translated “holy war”), the sewing of “God is Great” on the Iraqi flag, continual references to the illegitimacy of the Saudi government for inviting masses of “infidels” to the Arabian peninsula and thereby somehow desecrating the sacred lands of Islam (a reference to Mecca and Medina, places where non-Muslims are prohibited) and a pledge to liberate Jerusalem (the third most holy site in Islam).

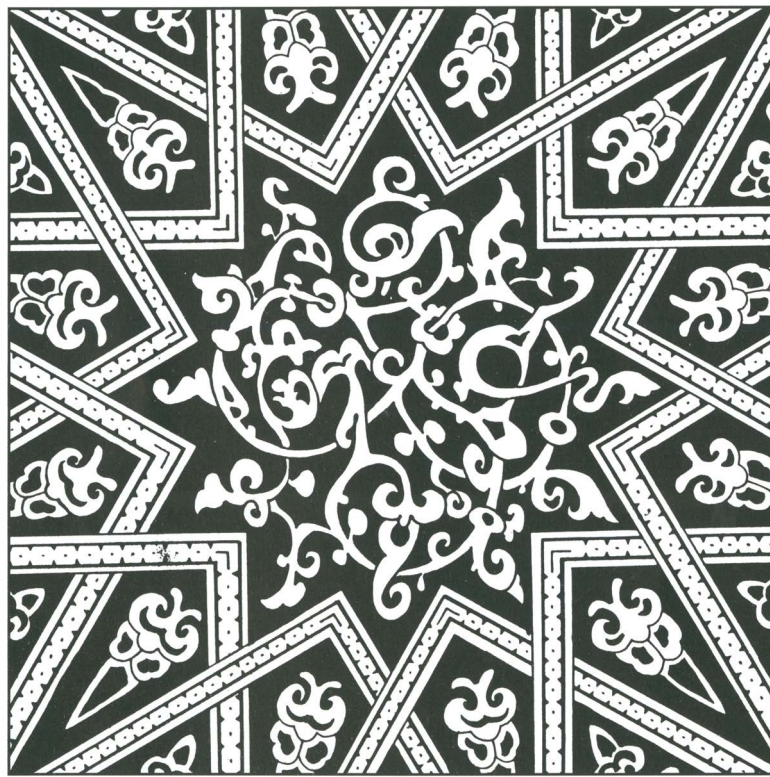
In an effort to demonstrate the support of the religious establishment, Saddam convened several hundred religious leaders in early January, 1991. The unofficial gathering included most Iraqi Muslim leaders as well as representatives from a variety of groups and movements outside Iraq. After

two days of predictable speeches, those assembled dutifully provided the approval Saddam desired. While many Muslims elsewhere were distressed by this event, people outside Iraq could only watch as Saddam Hussein evoked the type of uncritical support that had become a trademark of his political leadership. Various motives prompted the participants living outside Iraq. Participation for Iraqi Muslims, on the other hand, was obligatory: there was no room for dissent, at least for those who wished to see the sun shine the next morning.

A truer picture of a major segment of Iraqi Muslim sentiment was visible in the immediate aftermath of the gulf war. Within days of the formal cease fire, Shi’ites in southern Iraq led the insur-

gent forces seeking to topple Saddam’s regime. They seized control of several major cities. Religious leaders, together with their Shi’ite compatriots in neighboring Iran, moved into the forefront of news. U.S. reaction was mixed. On one hand, there was deep animosity toward Saddam Hussein, the leader President Bush described as a new incarnation of Hitler. On the other hand, a successful revolt in southern Iraq might produce another Iran. Consider the irony: a successful revolt against Saddam Hussein, a desirable development, would facilitate the spreading of Iran’s Islamic revolution—precisely the concern that prompted the United States to provide substantial support for Saddam Hussein’s Iraq throughout the 1980s!

Saddam’s appeal to religious sentiment



*Prohibited by religious restrictions from creating representational art, Muslim artists relied heavily on abstract patterns.*

sought to exploit these deep-seated frustrations by appealing to popular sentiment through an array of political and religious pronouncements.

## Islam in the Gulf War

Saddam Hussein is not a religious leader. He is a brutal, secular leader who “got religion” in August of 1990—soon after his ill-fated invasion of neighboring Kuwait. His newfound zeal for Islam was little more than a blatant and cynical attempt to rally support for his political policies.



*Kimball served as director of the Middle East Office of the National Council of Churches from 1983-90. During an official visit to Lebanon in 1987, he and two other American church leaders met with Catholicos Karekin II, the head of the Armenian church, and Lebanon's President Amine Gemayel.*

should be understood in context. For over eight years during Iraq's bloody war with Iran, the Iranian leadership employed Islamic language and imagery in opposition to Saddam's secular regime. Having observed first hand the power of its popular appeal, Saddam clearly determined to adopt a new strategy. His efforts did appeal to some Muslims at a popular level. However, most were not taken in by the ploy. A closer look at the notion of jihad helps to clarify the point.

The Western media focused considerable attention on Saddam's call for "holy war"; they paid considerably less attention to the pronouncements of legitimate Muslim authorities elsewhere, most of whom rejected Saddam. In fact, leading Muslims in Saudi Arabia declared a "holy war" against Iraq.

Few Muslims embraced Saddam's call for jihad. First, he had no religious authority for such a declaration. Second, most Muslims know well the primary and deeper meaning of the Arabic term jihad. Like the New Testament, the Qur'an enjoins the faithful to maintain a continual struggle against the frailties and selfish desires that hinder human beings from identifying and following the will of God. In Islam, this great, ongoing struggle for moral perfection is known as jihad ("strenuous effort," "striving in the way of God"). Historically, the meaning of jihad as outward struggle — particularly in the context of military confron-

tation — has always been secondary. In recent years, however, numerous religious and political zealots have emphasized this secondary meaning in the midst of political machinations.

Despite this, it is also important to understand that there was considerable popular support for Saddam in religious circles. Why? The answer lies in the political developments in the region. Many Muslims in the contemporary Middle East believe that political changes are both possible and necessary. And they argue fervently that Islam can provide the political, religious and economic frameworks for their societies. A political leader, even a brutal one such as Saddam, who is perceived—rightly or wrongly—as standing up to the forces that are believed to block such changes finds a great deal of support among some frustrated Muslims.

### Learning from the Crisis

There are many lessons to be learned from the traumatic events surrounding the gulf war. High on the list are lessons about Islam. Islamic institutions and Muslims motivated by their faith are playing an important role in a variety of countries in transition to new political structures. In our increasingly fragile and interdependent world the majority Christian community in the West must begin to make concerted efforts to break through the images and

stereotypes and come to a more accurate understanding of Islam. Better understanding will not bridge the differences between the communities; it can help both to deal constructively with the issues that unite and divide them.

Christians and Muslims worked together, fought and died together in the gulf war. This image of cooperation in a common cause must not be lost. Rather, it is important that we find ways to build on it. At the conclusion of the war, General Norman Schwarzkopf spoke directly to this point. Addressing departing troops on March 8, 1991, the Allied commander offered the following remarks:

You served in a place I'm sure none of you thought you'd serve. You've been places you never heard of. You've been places you can't even pronounce. But you also better take back with you some free lessons that your family, friends and the world can hear.

You're going to take back the fact that the word 'Arab' isn't a bad word. That you do not judge all Arabs by the actions of a few. And I know here that we have close, wonderful, warm and thankful people for us being here and (they) have expressed that thanks in many different ways.

And you are going to take back the fact that 'Islam' is not a word to be feared, it is a religion to be respected, just as we respect all religions. That's the American way.

General Schwarzkopf's observations and advice reflect a wisdom born of experience. We would all do well both to ponder the significance of these words and seek peaceful ways to live out the implications. □

*Charles Kimball's articles have appeared in a number of publications, including Sojourners, the Christian Century, the Los Angeles Times and the Boston Globe. His recent book, Striving Together: A Way Forward in Christian-Muslim Relations (Orbis Books, 1991, \$10.95) is already in its third printing. Highly praised by reviewers, Striving Together was described in the February issue of the prestigious Library Journal as "the most exciting book (in religion) this month.... Essential." A review in the May issue of Sojourners said, "It is difficult to imagine a book more timely or more needed...." His second book, Religion, Politics and Oil: The Volatile Mix in the Middle East, will be published by Abingdon Press this summer.*

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Translated, "In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate," this Arabic phrase begins all but one of the 114 chapters in the Qur'an.



## SCENES FROM AN EXHIBITION

History professor Jim Leavell and art professor Jinger Stuntz share a passion for photography. So when Leavell suggested that the art department sponsor an exhibit of photographs taken by faculty and staff members, Stuntz liked the idea and presented it to the art faculty. As a result, the department sent out a call for entries last fall and held the first faculty/staff exhibit in March.

The show was a great success. Thirty people submitted their work and 70 photographs were selected for exhibition. Ranging from large black and white and

color prints to a montage "Self Portrait" by artist Bob Chance, the photographs filled the Hallway Gallery of the Roe Art Building and attracted considerable attention.

"We were really pleased with the show," says Stuntz. "Knowing that so many people on the faculty and staff enjoy taking photographs, we wanted to give them an opportunity to show their work."

A few photographs from the exhibit are reproduced here. Photographers include Jim Leavell, Willard Pate and Ed Jones, faculty members whose work has appeared previously in this magazine.



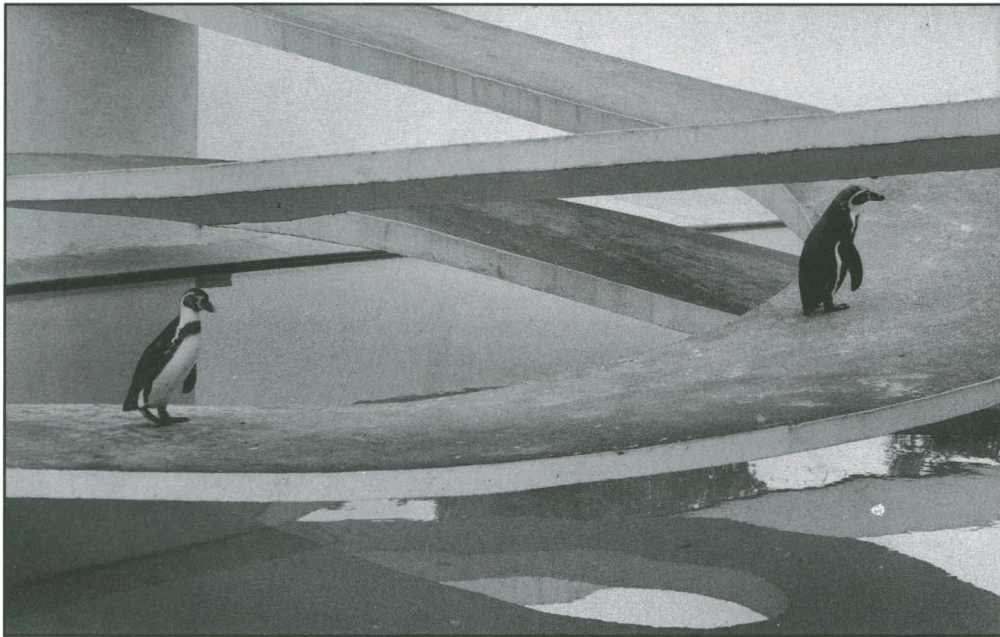








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1. "Tomorrow We Part II," Jinger Simkins Stuntz
2. "The Narrows," Willard Pate
3. "Eaves of Kamakura," Jim Leavell
4. "Jackass Penguins," Gary Harris
5. "Sanctuary," Jim Leavell
6. "Habersham, Ga.," Rhett Bryson
7. Untitled, Albert Blackwell





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8. Untitled, Lib Nanney

9. "Face of China, Imperial Garden,  
Forbidden City, Beijing, China,"  
Ed Jones

10. "Self Portrait," Bob Chance

11. "Elephants," Carolyn Watson

12. "Saturday Morning," Trisha Long

13. "Lines in Winter," Lib Nanney



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# ON THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

BY JIM STEWART

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*Although Furman has been integrated for more than 25 years, black students are still struggling to feel at home on campus.*

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**T**wenty-five years — a generation and more — have passed since Joe Vaughn became the first African-American to enroll at Furman. On that February day in 1965, Vaughn established himself, he once said, as “a majority of one.”

Since then, Furman’s black population has slowly grown to where it now numbers 81. Blacks are the largest minority group on campus, comprising about 3 percent of the student body. Most come from integrated or predominantly white high schools, so at first glance their transition to Furman might not seem that difficult.

But beneath this calm surface exists an uneasiness among blacks born of their feeling that, through the years, their interests have been neglected. Clearly, black alumni feel disconnected, as is evident from their lack of participation in university activities. Only now, it appears, is Furman beginning to acknowledge that because their numbers are so few, black students must cope with a special set of pressures that the majority — predominantly white, predominantly upper-middle class — never has to face.

Says Artie Travis, director of minority affairs and student activities, “Sometimes you feel like a black-eyed pea in a bowl of rice.” Lisa Stevens, a 1990 graduate who went on to law school at Stanford, offers a similar assessment: “People joke that you’d better go to class, because if you don’t everyone will know you weren’t there.”

In other words, they’re noticed. They remain such a minority that they feel conspicuous, and although they share with all students the same academic concerns, their problems tend to be compounded



*Lisa Stevens '90 believes a larger, more diverse black population would make everyone more comfortable on campus.*

because of their minority status, its accompanying cultural isolation, and what they see as limited social options.

It’s time, they say, for things to change.

Few contend that there are major racial problems on campus, and most agree that the existing problems stem more from a lack of understanding than from racism. Indeed, the university has been fortunate to avoid the kind of racial friction that has disrupted other colleges in recent years. Isolated incidences, such as the discovery of white supremacist literature in a stack of school newspapers or the shout of “nigger” from a dormitory window as a black student jogs by, are disturbing but aren’t considered

symptoms of something more sinister.

What blacks would like is for Furman to be more united, more inclusive. Sophomore Erika Ross quickly deduced that “Furman is a black and white campus. Students mix pretty well in classes, but socially they’re very separate.” Blacks also want more of a sense that they are an integral, as opposed to incidental, part of the whole.

And they offer a number of suggestions to improve the campus environment. They include increasing black enrollment, especially of black male non-athletes; planning social programs and campus activities that have broader appeal and provide more chances for them to participate and play leadership roles; and increasing the number of blacks on the faculty and administrative staff. Currently, three of the 184 full-time faculty members are black, which prompts this comment from Dwayne Jenkins, a junior biology major: “Furman does a bang-up job of hiring black custodians. I’m sure there are just as many qualified black educators out there that the university can recruit.”

In short, they want to raise the comfort level. Lisa Stevens says, “A lot of blacks feel that because there are so few of us, we have to stick together. If black enrollment were up, so that we had a more diverse black population, everyone would feel more comfortable in pursuing their own interests.” And all students would benefit. “By paying closer attention to the special needs of blacks and minorities, we can only increase understanding between the races,” she says. “It will bring the campus together.”

Today’s black students seem to sense that they are in a position to effect change. In years past, minorities were forced to adapt

when they went to predominantly white colleges. Now that diversity and the value of multicultural experiences have become key pursuits on college campuses, the institutions are making the adjustments.

As to Furman's response, the students say it's slow, but it's there. They welcome the school's involvement in programs to increase black faculty and to encourage minorities and women to enter the teaching profession. They applaud Furman's participation in tutoring and enrichment programs that strengthen the educational experiences of black students in secondary and elementary schools.

They are encouraged by the admissions office's marketing efforts that target black students, such as advertising in publications aimed at minorities or visiting areas with large minority populations.

And they are realistic. They acknowledge that change can take a while — even 25 years or more. They realize that fewer blacks, especially males, are attending college, and as a result fewer are earning advanced degrees. And they know that competition for black students and teachers is intensifying.

Still, they would like to see more progress. Says Tawanda Cooper, a 1990 graduate and former president of the Student League for Black Culture, "Furman is only two hours from Atlanta, Charlotte and Columbia, all with major black populations. I'm sure the students are out there; we just have to go and find them. Other universities are doing so."

Carey Thompson, Furman's director of admissions, would like nothing better. "Furman does not really reflect the real world," he says, "and for our students to get a rich, multicultural experience, we should."

Furman does, however, face certain limitations. It lacks the financial resources of many other schools, which affects its ability to recruit not just blacks, but all students. In addition, Thompson says that many minorities are less interested in the liberal arts than in applied areas, such as engineering or communications. Perhaps most tellingly, Furman's name does not carry much weight in the black community, a problem

Thompson hopes to address by implementing a program in which black alumni will help to recruit promising black students.

On average, Thompson says, Furman receives 70 to 80 applications from black students each year. Forty to 50 are accepted and 20 to 25, including athletes, enroll. The low numbers are frustrating. "Ideally, to have a representative, functioning black culture for students here, we probably should have 150 to 200 black students," he says. "But the process is slow; a lot of blacks are looking for a culture that isn't here."



CHARLIE REGISTER

*Billy Stockdale and Erika Ross think one benefit of attending a predominantly white school is that it will help to prepare them for situations they will face in the real world.*

One real plus, says Thompson, was the hiring of Artie Travis in the fall of 1989 as director of student activities and minority affairs. Travis arrived after black student leaders asked the administration to create a minority affairs position. Says Tawanda Cooper, "They were really receptive, and the result showed they were actively trying to satisfy a need we felt existed."

Travis, an experienced college adminis-

trator, has made an impact. His programming ideas, such as a dinner for incoming black students and their parents and a banquet for graduating seniors, have done much to recognize blacks' presence on campus. He helped start a monthly newsletter, *The River*, which offers a black perspective on issues and ideas, and he has worked to improve communication among the black students themselves.

One of his more far-reaching efforts has been to try to establish a black alumni network. Black students agree that they would

like to have much more contact with those who have gone before them. Travis' office compiled a directory of black alumni and is working on other programs designed to bring them back into the fold.

He isn't surprised by the lukewarm response. "Black alumni don't have close ties to Furman because they didn't feel comfortable here," he says. He hopes he can renew their interest, in part by appealing to their positive memories of the university.

Students also praise Travis for his ability to put issues into perspective and his willingness to confront problems. Their views are echoed by Harry Shucker, vice-president for student services, who says, "Artie's outspoken because he wants to better conditions on campus. Not everyone's comfortable with that, but he sees it as a reason Furman hired him — to voice some of those concerns."

In doing so, he has stepped on a few toes. People don't always want to hear that everyone is not satisfied with the status quo. "I've been accused of being a little confrontational and of being overly sensitive,"

Travis says. "Basically all I do is ask questions — such as are we doing things that make blacks not want to stay at Furman, or are we doing things that make them not want to tell their peers back home to come here."

On the whole, Travis thinks black students at Furman are "comfortable but restless." They're highly complimentary of the academic program; what chafes are the attitudes they detect on campus, attitudes





*For Tawanda Cooper '90, the lack of social opportunities for black students — especially black women — was a major source of frustration.*

they usually ascribe to whites' lack of exposure to different races, cultures and ideas.

Says Cooper, "A lot of what's said and done isn't intentional, but some people just don't think about things because they haven't been confronted with black students that often. For example, when fraternities and sororities hold slave auctions [fund-raisers in which they sell certain services], they don't realize they're calling attention to a sensitive part of our history."

Dwayne Jenkins says that white students at Furman tend to fit into three categories. The largest group consists of those who are so unaware of racial differences that they are surprised when an issue is raised. "If they hear about a problem, it's like you're speaking Greek," he says. "Many times they are turned off to the point that they say, 'Well, I don't believe anything's wrong. The blacks are just making noise like they always have.'" Other students, he says, recognize that racial and cultural differences exist and make the effort to understand varying viewpoints. A third, less prominent group, says Jenkins, holds decidedly racist views.

More subtle issues also rankle. One criticism blacks are especially tired of hearing is that they exclude themselves by sitting at the same table in the dining hall. They quickly respond that when fraternities and other white-dominated groups do the same thing, no questions are asked. Says Cooper, "Why is the burden of integrating always on blacks? Why should we always make the effort to sit with white students, to join their groups? That's the response of a lot

of blacks. They want others to make the effort sometimes. We took the first step by coming to Furman."

Adds Billy Stockdale, a senior and fullback on the football team, "Blacks at Furman have to go a little farther to be socially accepted. We have to fit into the white system. Instead of their seeing what our system is or what we like to do, there's just one world view of things. That's a problem here."

Other concerns extend beyond the student body. Black males are careful to carry their student identification card, in case Public Safety decides to stop them as they walk across campus at night. During classroom discussions, professors tend to single out black students for their views on such subjects as slavery, poverty or social inequality.

Stereotypes die hard as well. The tall, lanky Jenkins — the only non-athlete among black males in his class — laughs ironically when he tells of how a staff member with whom he was acquainted came up to him in the hall the day after a basketball game and said, "Hey, I saw you out there on the court." A case of mistaken identity, perhaps, but as Jenkins says, "That kind of thing is easy to say at Furman because most black males are athletes. But the stereotype is something we don't need to have."

He recalls an even more blatant example of insensitivity from a meeting in which a professor said, in effect, that graduate or professional schools will lower their standards

to admit blacks. "The statement wasn't true and shouldn't have been made," Jenkins says. "It wasn't necessarily malicious, but it came about because of that person's lack of knowledge and lack of awareness that it would be offensive to some groups in the room."

Another primary concern among black students is the dearth of social opportunities for them. One major reason: cultural differences. Lisa Stevens says, "Blacks like different kinds of music, different parties. We're not so much into keg parties — we'd rather have a dance."

Erika Ross says she and her suitemates, all of whom are black, often are left looking for things to do on weekends. White students seem to have more choices. "There's not a lot for blacks to do on campus," she says. "If fraternities or sororities are having a party, you tend to be reluctant to go by yourself because you don't want to be the only black person there, although I don't think they'd mind if a black person came."

Clemson, with a larger black student population, is close enough to provide occasional entertainment, and the recent creation of a black fraternity, Brotherhood of the Sphinx, and a tie-in with a national sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha, offer new social possibilities and leadership opportunities. Still, the options remain limited.

Given these concerns, then, why would a black student want to attend Furman? For the same reasons, says Travis, that anyone would — strong academics, the chance to work closely with professors, the benefits of a Furman degree. Blacks come knowing they will face a certain amount of isolation, but as Ross points out, "You're going to be in the minority a lot of times; it's something to get used to. You shouldn't let the numbers stop you from considering Furman. You're getting an education, and that's the most important thing."

Adds Stockdale, "Learning to cope with different people now may make things better for you down the road. That may be something white students don't see, but I can see it as a positive for me."

Although certain tensions exist with white students, the same can be said about the black community itself. Black athletes, for one, have an easier time establishing a comfort zone because they're automatically part of a team that shares an instant rapport. They usually find a niche before other students arrive, which tends to separate them.

Stockdale readily agrees and takes the idea a step further. "I'm accepted here, and I'm comfortable," he says. "Maybe that's because I'm an athlete who's known. People hear my name during football games, then in classes, they say 'Hey, you're Billy.' The name recognition makes it easier to

meet people. The non-athlete doesn't have that advantage."

Male-female relationships among blacks on campus have also been a source of contention. One reason: the women tend to be more academically oriented, the men more interested in sports. Because the majority of black men have little time for anything but practice and studying, the responsibility for planning activities, such as Black History Month or other events sponsored by the Student League for Black Culture, usually falls to the women. And because black athletes are often removed from the mainstream of student life, they may not know or care about issues that affect their fellow students. Perhaps the problem can't be helped, but it's one more reason why Furman needs to attract more black non-athletes.

Tensions rise further when the black men choose to date whites, a fairly common occurrence. Black women find this issue particularly frustrating because it increases their sense of isolation. Says Tawanda Cooper, "If the white guys were dating black girls, there wouldn't be that big a problem, but that doesn't happen. I've heard white students say they'd never date a black. It can be disheartening. When you're here for four years and the same thing goes on, the lack of social activities for black students, especially the women, is magnified."

Before Artie Travis arrived, these issues festered. But he called a meeting, and a frank, open discussion followed. Says Lisa Stevens, "The meeting helped people form friendships. We started talking and developing a basis for understanding each other rather than going by stereotypes." The problems may linger, but the lines of communication have improved.

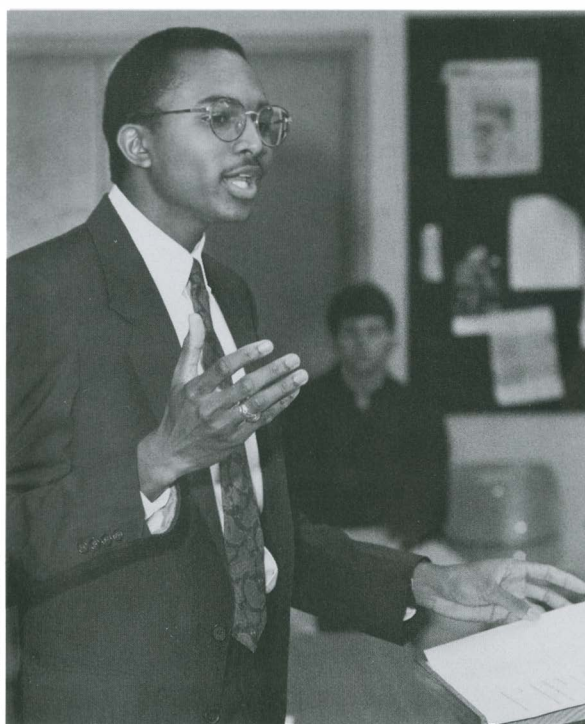
There are other divisions within the black population. Some blacks are labeled assimilationists because they are said to deny their culture to fit into the majority. Travis says, "Some parents may want their children to stay away from anything 'black' because of the stigma they think may be attached to the word." Other students are more reform-minded, interested in working for change within the system. There might even be a few (one?) who could be called militant, at least by Furman's standards. (See following story.)

Travis says one way to improve the campus atmosphere is to strengthen the image of the Student League for Black Culture so that it has the respect of everyone, including blacks. For whatever reason, only about a third of black students are actively involved, and although the group is open to all students, few seem to realize it.

Says Stockdale, "White students hear the words 'black culture' and say, 'Well, you have SLBC and that excludes whites.' In that sense, we haven't been effective in showing that we're a group for all, in trying to foster a better environment."

Erika Ross sees room for improvement. "SLBC could be a really productive organization if more people would come. Basically, the same people seem to attend every meeting," she says. "We could do a better job of publicizing meetings, making people aware that they're open to everyone."

"I think a lot of students are aware of blacks only when we have a complaint. Their image of blacks is that we're always complaining about something racial, that we're always being negative. But if they came to SLBC meetings, they'd realize we have a lot of positive ideas."



*Premed student Dwayne Jenkins delivers a talk on racism during a Black History Month program.*

Everyone agrees that communication is the key to improving the campus climate. Says Travis, "If white and black students sit down and talk about issues, they'll probably get them solved."

Some students do make the effort. Cooper and Stevens both say they had substantive discussions with white students about cultural and racial differences during their years at Furman, although Cooper adds with a smile, "You can get a little tired of explaining how you do your hair." Stockdale has seen positive signs as well: "Whites are getting to be more accepting. They're starting to sympathize more with what we feel. I've even had some white students tell me that if they were black, they wouldn't come here."

Jenkins, who has been active in student government, suggests that blacks can hasten change by becoming more involved in campus activities. "One thing that will dispel a lot of fallacies is when others see you breaking the stereotype, or acting out a part other than what they think you should be doing," he says, adding that by changing perceptions, you gain respect and open the lines of communication. But for the idea to work, he says, Furman needs to recruit more non-athletes "who are able to get into the mainstream of student life and carry the social and academic weight."

Stevens sees great value in supporting the predominantly black groups on campus. "It's important to recognize the special needs of anyone underrepresented in the college atmosphere, their right to have an organization that focuses on issues of concern to them," she says. "People should understand that anything with a racial focus is not just to make blacks feel more comfortable, but everyone. And it's important that the groups focus on providing not just for black students, but for the Furman community as a whole."

Despite the problems, the students interviewed for this article have positive feelings about Furman, and most say that given the same set of circumstances they would enroll again. Tawanda Cooper is one who hedges a bit. "I would come again because I think I've been enriched personally being in a situation where I'm one of a small minority," she says. "I've become more race-conscious and learned how to handle situations that might eventually arise."

On the other hand, she says, "I wouldn't come because it's frustrating when you're one of a small minority. There's a strain on you, especially socially or in a classroom where you're one black student in a sea of white."

The time has come to ease that frustration. Says Travis, "Black students need to support what Furman has to offer, because once they leave here the world is going to be the same. There are going to be more whites than blacks, and they need to know how to work and deal and survive in that environment."

"But they also have to do something to improve the quality of life for black students on campus. Blacks can be supportive and at the same time say, 'Listen to what we have to offer.'"

Dwayne Jenkins gets the last word. "The administration realizes that Furman needs diversity," he says. "Now's the time when black students and minorities in general can get in there and work with them to really make a difference for the future." □



# A DISSENTING OPINION

BY JIM STEWART

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*Direct and outspoken,  
Keisha Bridges is not afraid  
to criticize the attitudes  
of whites – or blacks  
– at Furman.*

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If there is such a thing as a militant among black students at Furman, then senior Keisha Bridges of East Point, Ga., is people's exhibit A.

She admits as much. "My opinions of Furman aren't the opinions of the majority of blacks here," she says. "Mine are quite extreme."

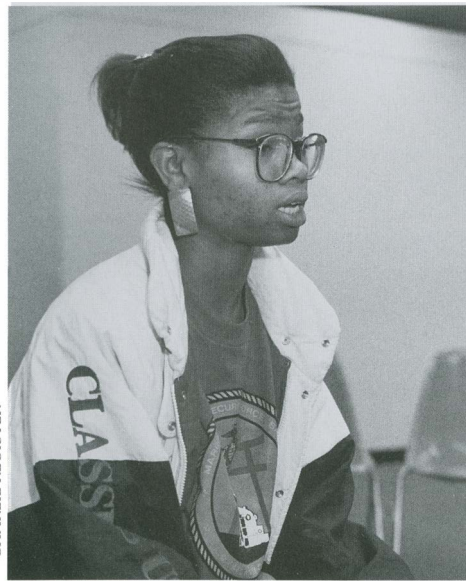
Extreme as in critical — of attitudes, groups and policies. Extreme as in radical — at least for Furman, where sometimes "radical" can mean anything that deviates even slightly from the norm.

Not that she is an especially angry young woman. She doesn't advocate a takeover of the administration building or a boycott of classes.

Her perspective is what separates her from other African-Americans on campus. Where most see insensitivity, she sees prejudice. Where some ignore minor slights, she reacts. "That's why they consider me radical," she says. "Not because I take so much action but because I don't have a problem voicing my opinions." While she's around, everyone had best stay alert.

She knows her directness doesn't endear her to her peers: "They think I'm close-minded, which is sort of true." And she believes her background helps set her apart. Having attended an all-black high school in Atlanta, she says she didn't fully anticipate the difficulties, the culture shock, that awaited at an almost lily-white school.

Her adjustment was further affected by what she calls the "passiveness" of her fellow black students. Most, she says, are from South Carolina — many from small towns — and attended racially mixed or predomi-



CHARLIE REGISTER

*After serving as president of the Student League for Black Culture for a year, Keisha Bridges says she now feels "older but wiser."*

nantly white high schools. Perhaps this made their transition easier, or at least helped them learn to cope. Whatever the reason, they saw things in more measured terms and accepted what she could not. Double culture shock.

So as an outsider in what is already a fringe group, she has led a rather solitary college life. But she has adapted. "Every situation won't be comfortable, and you have to learn to deal with that," she says. "If nothing else, coming to Furman has taught me that."

As to problems on campus, she says the biggest is that people won't admit their prejudices. "At this point, prejudice is such a sin and racism is on the upsurge, but no one

wants to think they could be prejudiced so the issue is never discussed," she says. "And no exchange of ideas is going on when no one is willing to admit the truth."

In her view, Furman students also tend to hide behind a veil of piety. They're so caught up in being religious, she says, that they can't even see problems, let alone confront them. "They say, 'We couldn't possibly be prejudiced because we're Christians.'"

She points to specific concerns, such as the revival of K.A. fraternity. The group, whose numbers had been dwindling, attracted a large pledge class this year. In keeping with tradition, pledges were required to wear Confederate flag emblems around campus. Bridges says that, when questioned about the practice, the pledges argued that they had to follow the rules and become full members of the fraternity before they could change its policies. (K.A. has since decided not to use Confederate symbols.)

To her, though, the group's actions are racist. "You could call it insensitivity if they didn't realize it bothers blacks, but they know," she says. "To say they don't know would be underestimating their intelligence."

"Either they know and don't care, or they care but aren't willing to do anything about it, which is the attitude of a lot of white students here. They say they care about black concerns, but they aren't doing anything to help improve things for black students."

She cites other examples. Her freshman year, she was appalled that the university chose to schedule the parade honoring the football team's national title on Martin Luther King Day. She was distressed when a white professor with whom she shared an

affinity decided to leave Furman — in large part, she suggests, because people were put off by his tendency to challenge their beliefs and attitudes. She also refers to surveys conducted by the Student League for Black Culture which have documented, over several years, how some professors belittle black students or discourage them from pursuing certain careers.

"Too many things at Furman are just tolerated," she says, indicting students and administration alike. "Everything that's racist or insensitive is explained by 'the person didn't know this would bother you.'"

That she detects this attitude among black students is especially frustrating. They're too willing, she believes, to excuse subtle acts of racism. "At my high school,

I wasn't considered radical," she says. "But then I came here and saw that people were so lax, that they would just let things go by. To know that blacks here are willing to overlook things that bother them..." She lets the sentence trail off.

Then why stay? She acknowledges that she would be happier at another school, and she seriously considered leaving after her sophomore year. But she wasn't sure she could get the same financial help elsewhere, and academically she was doing well as a double major in accounting and computing-business. A meeting with Harry Shucker, vice-president for student services, helped her decide to stay. "I felt a little more comfortable after he showed me that people were concerned about black student life," she says. "They realized it wasn't that great and were trying to improve it."

And she became more involved. She joined the Student Alumni Council and was elected president of the Student League for Black Culture, despite her differences with most of its members. She says, "Even though people consider me pretty radical, they think I'll work hard. They don't agree with me, but maybe they respect my frankness."

The presidency has not, however, provided the bully pulpit she had hoped for. "My ideas haven't jelled," she says. "I thought I could change attitudes, get people to say what they feel, and I haven't."

Although Keisha Bridges is resigned to the current atmosphere on campus, her vision of Furman's future is not totally bleak. She admires the way this year's black freshmen worked together and says their unity will improve campus life for them and those who follow. She thinks the administration is trying to meet the needs of blacks, but she regards such proposals as adding programs and increasing black faculty as a Band-Aid approach to a much bigger problem.

American society needs an attitude adjustment, she says. The real work must start there. "It's impossible to change, overnight, attitudes that have been shaped over many years," she says. "The civil rights era brought substantial changes, but in a sense they were cosmetic because the attitudes people supposedly got rid of still exist. You can see that in the campaigns of Jesse Helms or David Duke."

As for Furman? "Things will be better for those with attitudes different from mine," she says. "There's not much Furman can do to improve my experience, but that's not to say its efforts won't make another black's experience better." □

*While she's been disappointed by the lack of interest in black concerns at Furman, Bridges sees the possibility for improvement in the future.*



CHARLIE REGISTER



# The Pleasures of Biography – WRITING THE LIFE OF MARGARET MITCHELL

BY DARDEN ASBURY PYRON

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*A woman of great charm  
and personal magnetism,  
the author of *Gone with the  
Wind* was far more than a  
one-book wonder.*

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All in all, I consider that afternoon one of the most memorable of my life.

The weather, first off, was glorious. Spring, surely, had never graced Charlottesville more completely. Then, too, earlier in the week I had delivered the Page-Barbour Lecture at the University of Virginia, and I still basked in the honor. In addition, the day before, as a part of my ongoing research for my biography of Margaret Mitchell, I had interviewed one of her first and greatest friends, a remarkable 90-year-old woman named Courtney Walthall Ross, who had given me more information than I thought possible — hard data, anecdotes, and not least a 70-year-old scrapbook that overflowed, literally, with photographs, clippings and notations dating to 1912.

I had already enjoyed a most productive visit, then, when my old graduate school mentor, Bill Harbaugh, and I walked around the corner from his house to talk with Dumas Malone, one of the great men of U.S. history and American biography. Over 90 years old, Malone had just completed the final and most moving volume of a five-volume life of Thomas Jefferson that he had begun over 40 years before. Although almost completely blind and hard of hearing, this venerable man had lost none of his mental acuity. He asked question after question about my work, and answered my own questions with intelligence, grace and wit.

The three of us, biographers all (Harbaugh had written about Theodore Roosevelt), spent the hours trading ideas on the craft of biography, sharing insights and discussing mutual interests. It was as rich an experience as I could imagine. Indeed, that afternoon



*Although Courtney Walthall Ross (right) was descended from generations of Southern aristocrats, she and her pal Margaret Mitchell established notorious reputations at Washington Seminary in Atlanta for rebellious behavior, a reputation that persisted into adolescence and adulthood for both girls.*

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has excited my imagination for years. I still mull the problems and issues it generated.

I recount one episode in particular. During my interview with Mitchell's friend, the sharp old woman had told of the break in her friendship with the novelist. Having heard that Mitchell was ailing, she bought flowers and went around to her friend's apartment to visit. When she arrived, she found the door cracked; she hallooed and entered. Without any other word, Mitchell greeted her in a towering rage, took the

flowers, slammed them to the floor, "and shouted at me to leave and never return." Here was an extraordinary little affair and a compelling set of facts. But what, I asked Malone, do I make of the anecdote?

An interview with still another Mitchell intimate had uncovered an equally curious story of the novelist's young womanhood. The writer was jousting with two of her younger bohemian friends, and the conversation turned, as it often did, to matters of sex and sexuality. As the talk followed its own logic, suddenly Mitchell blurted out, "I would never allow a man to touch my breasts!" She had, at the time, been married to a second husband three or four years. Again I inquired of the dean of American biography: What in the name of Plutarch does one make of such a tale?

Malone listened attentively to the stories. He smiled at both. Instead of answering my question, however, he responded with a judgment. As near as I can reconstruct his statement after five or six years, he said, "You literary biographers are so lucky! Your material is so rich and you can use all these little personal stories and intimate anecdotes in your work!"

I am still not exactly sure what he intended, but at the time I interpreted him to mean that straight or traditional biography, basically of male political or military leaders, prohibited the inclusion of such lively and intimate anecdotal material. My interpretation may or may not be correct, and Malone

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*For this formal photograph taken in 1947 to illustrate an article for the Atlanta Journal, Mitchell posed in her Atlanta apartment with her cat and a few of the foreign copies of her novel.*





is no longer alive to clarify his comment.

But even if my judgment is right, Malone's answer still raises numerous problems on its own. Why not use such material, if it occurs, to illuminate the life of a great public man? Or conversely, why should one use such stories with a literary figure but not in traditional biography? Why are two rules and a double standard necessary?

I continue to reflect upon these issues as my work goes to press, and while I contemplate moving from a classic literary figure and woman, Margaret Mitchell, to writing a life of William Tecumseh Sherman, as antithetical a figure as one can imagine, I have reached at least one conclusion. However I used or ignored all these anecdotes about the author of *Gone with the Wind*, she generated this kind of material with every breath and utterance, and this wealth of data made writing her life an unending pleasure whether or not this material found its way into my biography.

Confederate General Richard Taylor, son of President Zachary Taylor, once said that Southerners simply would not be bored. To paraphrase: better dead than dull. Margaret Mitchell's life embodies the regional dictum.

*She was, of course, not  
always funny.... she was  
capable of bloodshot,  
frothing fury and relentless  
vengeance.*

I first conceived of a biographical study of the novelist as early as 1977, and in 14 years of steady work my subject has never once grown tedious to me. Even as I check proofs of chapters I have written and rewritten countless times, I still laugh out loud at her jokes, droll stories and witticisms. To pass the time, for example, she invented fractured epigraphs, and one of these always makes me laugh: "Those whom the gods love, they grind exceeding fine."

With a natural-born sense of paradox and incongruity, she was a very, very funny person. Just so, she nurtured the sense of amusement and delight in others, who, in

repeating anecdotes of her life, revitalize the sense of vivid color that always haloed her personality.

She was, of course, not always funny. As in the story of repudiating her oldest friend, she was capable of bloodshot, frothing fury and relentless vengeance. If generous and gracious virtually to a fault, another side of her character demanded she count pennies meanly, doubt others' motives, and rage against those who impinged upon her generosity. Whether Peggy Good or Margaret Mean, however, she was virtually incapable of being boring.

Margaret Mitchell has been, in short, the biographer's rarest prize — amusing, intelligent and near the center of events of her generation. Moreover, because she read so widely, knew so many people and lived at such a critical time in national and regional history, her life becomes a kind of microcosm of the larger events in 20th-century culture, or at least a remarkable lens for reconsidering the epochal events of the first half of our century. This, at least, is how I treat her in my book.

Yet for all her "cultural significance," the charm of her character still most beguiles me, even as it did her friends. One of her company of rogue young aristocrats put it nicely. Her friend Harvey Smith remembered:

Unlike many great conversationalists, Peggy was not a monologist, she allowed others to talk at great length . . . . She was sincerely interested in so many things and so intensely interested in some that her attitude towards conversation with people who interested her was one of making a sincere effort to put them at their ease, make them feel charming and important and to learn as much as possible about them. As soon as Peggy could discover or imagine the trend of one's secret wish as regarded one's self, she played up to it quite openly and laid on the flattering picture so heavily that those around were often annoyed but never the subject.

She wrote with much the same style and motive, and it is no accident that generations of readers from Juneau to Tierra del Fuego, from San Francisco to Moscow and Finland to Tokyo, have cherished her novel and return to it over and over as to holy writ.

The charm of her writing raises another issue. Perhaps the most persistent question I face in discussing my work is the problem of a "one-book author." The question frequent-

*The gaudy premier of Gone with the Wind in December 1939 at Atlanta's Loew's Grand swept news of the European war off the front pages for days, and its delicious vulgarity even helped inspire a short story by Flannery O'Connor, "A Late Encounter with the Enemy." A poster based on the celebrated episode captures the enthusiasm the affair provoked.*







ly implies some defect as a writer: she could not get it together again or she had only one book in her, so runs the prejudice.

Actually, Mitchell wrote prolifically. Between 1922 and 1926 she produced around 200 major essays, articles and reviews for the *Atlanta Journal*. Although journalism of its nature lacks staying power, Mitchell's newspaper writing stands up remarkably well after 60 years.

Still more significantly, however, Mitchell produced one of the most remarkable collections of letters of any otherwise private, literary citizen in the 20th century. Although her archives at the University of Georgia preserve only selected letters she wrote between 1936 and her death in 1949, the collection numbers in the thousands. The Macmillan Collection at the New York Public Library contains hundreds more. If many of her letters consisted of only one-page notes, an astonishing number ran pages and pages. Little absorbed more of her time, energy and imagination.

Yet her post-1936 letters only confirm a pattern that she established even as a little girl. She wrote letters all her life. Almost all of her pre-fame efforts have been lost, but those that survive underline her commitment to the form. A 17-page typed letter to

Harvey Smith in 1932 proved fairly normal. A run of 19 long letters between 1919 and 1921 to a former boyfriend, Allen Edee, was not exceptional.

In several instances I have been able to catalogue the letters she wrote within a given time period. The number staggers the imagination. One batch of letters written just after the appearance of *Gone with the Wind* represents something like a norm.

After publication of several extraordinary reviews of her novel in New York on Sunday, July 5, 1936, the pressure became impossible, and on the following Tuesday the author fled Atlanta. In a space of just over 24 hours — counting driving time to Gainesville, Ga., where she holed up in a hotel under an assumed name — she wrote at least 10 letters. They averaged five or six pages each. She favored Herschell Brickell, Edwin Granberry and Stephen Vincent Benet for their reviews. George Brett, president of the Macmillan Company, got his too. She also whipped off long letters to a clutch of admirers in east Tennessee who had reviewed her book earlier and with whom she had already established a correspondence: Gilbert Govan, Julia Collier Harris, and an old friend from her *Journal* days, Hunt Clement.

Known as a sparkling conversationalist, Mitchell could hold her own even with such Hollywood luminaries as Vivien Leigh, Clark Gable and *Gone with the Wind*'s producer, David Selznick.

Several of these letters appear in Richard Harwell's edition of her post-fame correspondence, and his sampling suggests the richer whole. Charming individually, they lose none of their sparkle taken all together. They brim with wit, intelligence, information and, as always, her self-deprecating humor.

Notable too, they establish a well-defined relationship with the correspondents. She is the innocent and suppliant maiden who pleads their indulgence. However experienced, senior or jaded her correspondents, few failed to melt before such treatment. Thus she favored everyone she wrote.

I argue in my biography that Mitchell's letters constitute "a literature of choice" — that she chose this form of literary expression the way some people write short stories, others sonnets, or still others novels. She created letters as a self-conscious art form, in contrast, for example, to using them merely as a means of conveying discrete information about a given subject.



She clearly understood this semi-public, semi-literary aspect of letter writing. Her letters regularly refer to the conventions of the form, but she also knew the works of those who had built their reputations on letter-writing, especially women. She certainly knew Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, and her journalistic writings revealed her knowledge of many others whose fame rested on their correspondence. Among her favorite books was an edition of *Letters of Madame*, a selection of the extraordinary correspondence of the sister-in-law of Louis XIV. She returned to the volume year after year to savor this rare woman's correspondence.



*As a leader of Atlanta's bohemian set in the 1920s, Mitchell thrived on challenging conventional notions of speech, behavior and dress. One of the photographers from the Atlanta Journal, where she worked from 1922-26, captured her high above the skyline of the city.*

The treatment of letters as art, or artifice, raises the most difficult questions for a biographer, especially insofar as Mitchell's correspondence serves as the basis for factual judgments about the author herself. If her letters are a kind of art, one quotes them as fact at peril of truth. That caveat notwithstanding, the letters have the same compulsive narrative flow as her novel and the same magnetic quality as her personality.

One of the most onerous aspects of concluding my study of her life was omitting so many of the wonderful tales she spun in her letters, for in person or in writing she could turn the most mundane events and work-a-day facts into magical narratives. One manifestation of her literary magic that did not make its way into the final draft of my manuscript stands for all those letters that remain unpublished.

The Georgia Press Institute had con-

vened at Tifton in 1933, and attending this gathering with her husband, Mitchell had been attracted to a bright young editor from Valdosta, De Witt Roberts. Valdosta lay at the edge of western civilization, and the presence of such a fellow from such an unlikely place intrigued her. She described her encounter with this fine young man to her dear friend Harvey Smith. "While I do not mean to throw off on Valdosta," she began inoffensively, "I sometimes wonder how he came out of it as he doesn't seem to fit there, a cultured, charming, unassuming boy who doesn't seem to have a notion that he's got good sense." She liked "quare" fellows, and he was one, she reckoned.

Mitchell loved hearing good stories as much as telling them, and De Witt Roberts was a gold mine of stories. Echols County was boondocks, and few paid much attention to its goings-on, but this urbane South Georgian brimmed with its otherwise untold tales. "He is full of anecdotes of Valdosta and the backwoods of Echols County — the kind of stories that Southerners enjoy and scream over but which we would be mortified should any furriner hear." Violence, murder and incest set them rolling:

We were talking about incest in the more backward sections of the South — Georgia especially. Such matters

seldom get in the papers and are seldom talked about, unless you happen to know newspaper men or lawyers who run across them. Haven't you noticed how often these fearfully brutal and seemingly motiveless murders come out of the rural backwoods? Lots of times, incest is at the bottom of them — I suppose it's because movies are so far away and light ladies not procurable.

Then followed the "fair sample" of the Valdosta editor's stories.

De Witt started off by telling about a young backwoodsman who was up for trial for shooting his grandfather who was also his father (now figure that one out) over the favors of his sister. I do not remember if Grandpa was the sister's father as well. And he went on to this story... A young farmer from out of this particular section met a girl of the section when, for some reason, she had come away from home on a visit. He married her and went back to live with her people. After a brief while, he went to her in

*Margaret Mitchell's mother's family owned a city block on the hill just east of Five Points in downtown Atlanta, and her grandparents' elaborate Victorian mansion might have served as a model for Scarlett O'Hara Butler's home in post-war Atlanta (opposite). As athletic as she was unconventional, Mitchell loved the out-of-doors and adventure. She often wore a cycling outfit in the mid-twenties (bottom left). As perhaps her most extraordinary violation of the conventions of Southern ladyhood, she started out to travel around the world alone in 1924. She got as far as Cuba before she discovered the hazards of traveling alone as a single woman (bottom right).*

horror and complained that her father was having carnal relations with her sister. Whereat the bride, looking a trifle surprised at his warmth of emotion, observed, "Why, honey, why are you so upset bout them two. Didn't you know I done had two babies by Pappy?"

Righteously worked up, the groom went to the nearest justice of the peace and as the groom was from a larger and more enlightened community and knew something about law, he demanded an "incest warrant" against his father-in-law. The Justice had never heard of such a thing and said as much and opined that if the groom didn't like the ways of the community he'd better go back where he came from... The boy had to go all the way to Valdosta to get his incest warrant and there he struck a snag. DeWitt says that an election is due soon and the sheriff or prosecuting attorney or whoever it is that issues warrants is running for reelection and this state officer knows that if he issues such a warrant he'll lose every vote in that section. DeWitt said the court house was convulsed at the idea of the Incest Vote being the deciding factor in administering justice and that they are all urging the young candidates to get out in the backwoods and make a play for this same incest vote.

Who could resist this rollicking tale of backwoods incest? And who could resist the author who gave it life? The delight such a tale generates evokes the same pleasure that generations of readers have attested to worldwide in their response to her epic fiction.

Maybe then, in the final analysis, Dumas Malone was right. Maybe literary biographers are the lucky ones. To work with such a subject, I, at least, consider myself fortunate indeed. And chronicling the life of this provincial Scheherazade, using words as if her life depended on it, has inspired this biographer for rather more than a thousand and one nights. □

*A fourth-generation Furman graduate, Darden Asbury Pyron, class of 1964, teaches history at Florida International University in Miami. His book, Southern Daughter: The Life of Margaret Mitchell, will be published by Oxford University Press in August, when it will be a Book of the Month Club alternate selection. Pyron received a Ph.D. in history from the University of Virginia in 1975.*





All photographs used with this article, except the one of Mitchell's grandparents' house, are from the Margaret Mitchell Collection, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia. The photograph of the house appears by courtesy of the Atlanta Historical Society.



The eighties were marked by a massive educational assault on the basic weaknesses of American students. This onslaught was carried out primarily with pedagogical ammunition (mostly blanks) designed to instill a mastery of "the basics." Now, after more than a decade of this national seizure, it is time to study the effect of these efforts on college students in the nineties.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) provides the only continuing assessment of what American students can do in different subjects. Since 1969, assessments have been made every four years in reading, writing, math, science and other fields. These assessments are an integral part of the evaluation of education in this nation.

*The Reading Report Card*, published last year by NAEP, helped summarize the reading performance of our nation's students at ages 9, 13 and 17 based on assessments conducted from 1970 to 1988. In the eighties the 17-year-olds, who were born from 1962 to 1970, showed improvement in reading performance. The 9-year-olds also improved steadily from 1971 to 1980. However, the reading performance of 9-year-olds declined in 1984 and remained down in 1988. The 13-year-olds improved from 1971 to 1980, but declined during the eighties.

The most dramatic gains in reading occurred during the seventies, when the federal government offered much early support through Head Start and Title I (now called Chapter 1) programs. The federal faucet, however, slowed to a drip in the eighties and the prospects are dim for wetter seasons ahead. In 1988 only 4.8 percent of our nation's 17-year-olds read at an advanced level, the smallest percentage since the reading assessments started.

In writing, data were collected for 4th and 11th grades from 1974 to 1988, and for 8th grades as well in the eighties. These data revealed that the levels of writing performance in 1988 were essentially the same as in 1974. In 1988, a mere 16 to 28 percent of students across all grades performed at the "adequate" or better levels. An overwhelming majority of 11th graders, who are now college age, could not write an adequate persuasive paper to influence others or move them to action. *The Writing Report Card* also revealed that students' attitudes toward writing became increasingly negative as they moved up through the grades.

*The Mathematics Report Card* described the latest performance of 17-year-olds in the eighties as "dismal." Only 6.4 percent of 17-year-olds could apply a range of reasoning skills to solve multi-step

problems. The few gains that were made were in lower-level skills and basic concepts. It appears, then, that President Bush's goal for America to be number one in mathematics by the year 2000 borders on being ambitious.

Since 1983 approximately 100 national reports have called for improvement in science education. It is distressing, then, to learn from *The Science Report Card* that students' science achievement in the eighties remained well below the level of achievement by students in 1969. Only 7 percent of the 17-year-olds had the background in science to perform well in college-level science.

I think it's safe to assume that the number of students seeking careers in science in the nineties will be very low.

Most of America's educational efforts during the eighties focused on an uninspiring, glassy-eyed trip "back to the basics." The public flagellated educators, students and school systems for not developing more such curricula.

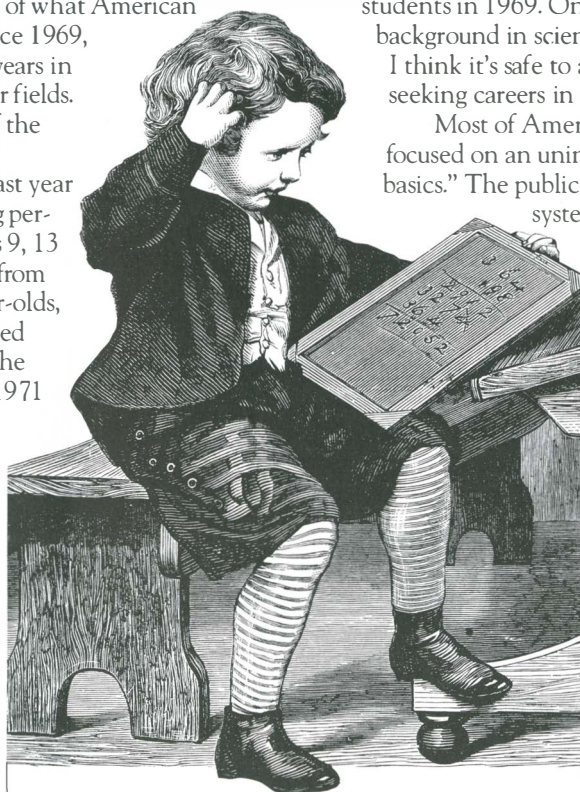
Minimal competencies were sought with a mechanistic frenzy. State after state, South Carolina included, formed task forces, committees and think tanks designed to reduce academic areas to small, manageable, indivisible, measurable units that can be placed on ditto sheets, workbooks and computers. All of this work was aimed at helping students "master the basic skills."

Now, after a decade of such endeavor, a wail of outrage can be heard across the land: "Our students can't do higher-level work!" Well, it seems that a syllogism is in order here. Organisms tend to learn what they are taught. Students are organisms. Students tend to learn what they are taught.

Unfortunately, the Bush administration's "Just Say Yes" educational policy will do little to improve the quality of education. Such serious problems as increasing drug use and violence in our schools and a pervasive sense of hopelessness cannot be solved merely by involving more parents, setting more

goals and giving more exams.

In the absence of national leadership and with the NAEP's gloomy statistics in mind, it is difficult to predict anything but a shrinking pool of well-qualified, academically competitive college students for the 1990s. □



## IN SEARCH OF QUALIFIED COLLEGE STUDENTS

BY THOMAS CLOER, JR.

Dr. Tom Cloer is professor of education and coordinator of special counseling at Furman. In 1988 he was named South Carolina's first Professor of the Year.



## LETTERS

### THE LOVE OF GOODNESS

You will have a hard time topping the summer 1990 issue. Despite a break of almost 25 years since my student days, the issue immediately rekindled feelings of friendship and spiritual and intellectual kinship I enjoyed at Furman. The ethical values, the love of goodness, respect for thought, and a recognition of the responsibility to give something back to our community — the ideals we were taught — are still worthy of our service. And the teachers — Bill Leverette, Al Reid, Theron Price, L.D. Johnson, Dr. Gilpatrick and John Crabtree. They are people we students can never forget because they have become part of us. I join you in saluting them and I thank you for the news of my other friends from across the years.

Ed Bridges '67  
Montgomery, Ala.

### DISHEARTENED

After reading the stories of "A Radical Reunion," I was ashamed and disheartened that I am an alumnus of Furman. The "radicals" of the sixties and seventies are now the "yuppies" of today. They have changed the philosophy of democracy from "of the people" to the elite and the rich. They have changed our society from a moral society based on Judaism and Christianity to a humanistic and amoral society. Our nation has become a nation where materialism and Hedonism have taken over.

Please take my name off the Furman alumni roll.

Russell D. Smith, M.A.'60  
Spartanburg, S.C.

### A TRUE RENAISSANCE MAN

Congratulations on the fine summer issue of *Furman Magazine*. I particularly appreciated the cover story on John Crabtree, which vividly recalled for me my own years at Furman under his tutelage. I was in the inaugural group of students in the College Teaching Honors Program he developed. Like several others in the group, I entered the program because, as a sophomore, I had had the good fortune to study English literature with him. I could speak at length about his brilliance in the classroom, the passion and perspicacity with which he approached his subject, the dedication to learning he both exemplified and inspired, but I might best summarize by saying that he was — is — a teacher fully worthy of the great texts he shares with his students. He became for me, as for so many others, an invaluable mentor and model.

Seldom can one locate with entire precision those events, out of all the complex ebb and flow of daily existence, that set one's life on a definitive future course; but I can say with certainty that my choice of university teaching came about because of John Crabtree. His influence, inspiration and wise counsel were immeasurably important to me, as they have been to generations of Furman graduates. Your article was a fitting tribute to a true Renaissance man.

Susan Hardy Aiken '64  
Professor of English and Comparative  
Literature  
The University of Arizona



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*"Jerusalem from Dominus Flevit Chapel" by James M. Pitts*